

THE LOST PRACTICE OF BIBLICAL HOSPITALITY:  
A PATHWAY TO THE HEART OF AN ISOLATED GENERATION OF COLLEGE  
STUDENTS

A THESIS-PROJECT

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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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To Katie Grady.

## CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vii
ABSTRACT.....	viii

### Chapter

1. THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING.....	1
2. THE BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY.....	20
3. A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY LITERATURE.....	42
4. PROJECT DESIGN.....	62
5. OUTCOMES.....	78

### Appendices

A. QUESTIONNAIRE INSTRUMENTS.....	130
B. INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT.....	135
C. FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW.....	137

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	152
VITA.....	156

## FIGURES

### Figure

1. "My usual way of interacting with friends is..." .....	87
2. "My preferred way of interacting with friends is..." .....	88
3. How many times students attended dinner during the semester.....	101
4. "Now that the semester is at an end, I feel like I know my Spiritual Formation professor very well." .....	103
5. "Now that the semester is at an end, I feel like my Spiritual Formation professor knows me very well." .....	104
6. "I feel very close to God right now".....	108
7. "God feels very real to me right now." .....	109
8. "I feel like God is someone who listens to me." .....	109
9. "I feel like God is Someone who responds to me." .....	110
10. Percent Growth, Beginning to End of Semester "I feel like God is Someone who responds to me." .....	110
11. "I feel that I currently have a strong knowledge of God's truth." .....	112
12. Percent Growth, Beginning to End of Semester "I feel that I currently have a strong knowledge of God's truth." .....	112
13. "I feel that I currently have a strong knowledge of how God's truth applies to my spiritual life." .....	113
14. Percent Growth, Beginning to End of Semester "I feel that I currently have a strong knowledge of how God's truth applies to my spiritual life." .....	114
15. Students who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement: "I know virtually all of the names of the students in my Spiritual Formation class." .....	115
16. Percent Reduction, Beginning to End of Semester, Students who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement: "I know virtually all of the names of the students in my Spiritual Formation class." .....	116

17. "I feel that I know a fellow student in this Spiritual Formation class with whom I can have serious personal conversations." .....	117
18. Percent Growth, Beginning to End of Semester, Students who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "I feel that I know a fellow student in this Spiritual Formation class with whom I can have serious personal conversations." .....	118
19. Students who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement: "I feel I have a mentor with whom I can discuss sensitive matters of spiritual importance to me." .....	119
20. Percent Reduction, Beginning to End of Semester, Students who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement: "I feel I have a mentor with whom I can discuss sensitive matters of spiritual importance to me." .....	120

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## ABSTRACT

This Doctor of Ministry thesis-project serves as both a biblical theology of hospitality and a survey of recent literature on Christian hospitality while aiming to answer this research question: Is the largely lost biblical practice of hospitality an effective way to communicate spiritual truth to a generation of youth in America who were raised in a technologically-wired but relationally-deprived age? This thesis-project studies Christian college students in two entry-level Spiritual Formation classes, both their experiences with hospitality in the past and how they respond to the Christian hospitality shown to them by their class professor.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

#### **A Hospitable Home: Lessons in Ministry**

After a brief internship as a worship leader in my first year of seminary, I decided to try my hand in a new type of ministry role at a more prominent church that seemed as if it was growing into a thriving suburban megachurch. A friend of mine, a fellow Master of Divinity student, invited me to help him run the young adult ministry, which consisted mostly of a Monday night service for about fifty people, primarily college students and young, single professionals. We had a contemporary worship band which played four songs at the service, and a sermon given by one of us. While the service itself was well-attended (especially for one of the least-churched states in the country), relational dynamics before and after the small service were awkward.<sup>1</sup> People were uncomfortable talking to one another, and attempted to leave almost immediately after the service ended.

There was at least one notable exception. A single mother of two kids befriended my wife and me. One year older than us, her ex-husband was incarcerated, leaving her with two preschoolers to raise alone. Easy to talk to and a natural community builder, my wife and I were pleased when she invited us over for dinner. The invitation was humbling. But we gladly accepted. I struggle to find words to communicate the significance of that night for me as a minister, but the impact was profound.

The meal was normal, nothing fancy, a casserole, as I remember. The apartment was basic, and though well-cared for, it was obviously the home of two children of preschool age,

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1. Pew Research Center Staff, "How Religious is Your State?" *Pew Research Center*: February 29, 2016. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/02/29/how-religious-is-your-state/?state=oregon>

with toys on the floor and scratches on the walls. The plates and utensils were mismatched. The little boy threw a fit at one point. But the bonding sense of community between the five of us was tangible. The single mom's simple gesture of hospitality kindled a friendship that is still strong seventeen years later. That night, after almost twenty years of vocational ministry, remains central to my sense of calling in ministry.

Dr. Christine Pohl, perhaps the preeminent contemporary voice on the topic of Christian hospitality, makes reference to the hospitable host inviting those who cannot repay into their home for a meal, stating, "you do really have a sense that you're standing on holy ground when you're interacting with strangers."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, my wife and I found the experience of this meal to be remarkable, in part because we were not the host, but those invited. That night, this young, unassuming single mom changed the trajectory of our ministry model, and we quickly incorporated these lessons learned into our young adult ministry group. We found that, at least for us, smaller is better, that an intimate sense of Christian community is important, and, though we might not have quite recognized it at the time, there is power in the offering of a hospitable home to strangers.

In the fall of 2003 after graduating from seminary, we moved to Boone, North Carolina to create a new student ministry at Appalachian State University. Initially, my ministry efforts were focused on a small interfaith discussion group. Filled with ambition to reach students of postmodern culture with innovative and clever strategies, I quickly found that my results in ministry were lackluster. Although I engaged in deep conversations about faith with a number of non-Christian or doubting Christian students, there seemed to be little lasting evidence of change in their lives. Frustrated by the lack of progress, I decided to transition my efforts in 2005 to

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2. Miyoung Yoon Hammer, "Restoring Hospitality: A Blessing for Visitor and Host: A Conversation with Christine Pohl." *Fuller Studio* (2018): <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/restoring-hospitality-blessing-visitor-host>.

something more “inherently Christian.” I realized that the interfaith group remained primarily at the level of discussion, and hoped that creating a specifically Christian Bible study for non-Christians and doubting Christians would lead to deeper results in the spiritual lives of students.

So we opened our home for a discussion-based Bible study, held weekly on Wednesday nights. While we remembered the lessons in community and relational intimacy learned from our dinner invitation in Oregon, I am not sure we quite remembered the power of hospitality itself at the time. In fact, we decided to hold our student ministry meeting in our home, largely for practical reasons. The university's student union building offered rooms to student clubs and organizations, but meeting times were limited to two hours and the expensive, new facilities seemed relationally cold and sterile. But meeting in our home turned out to be providential. It became evident that, perhaps like the homes of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42; John 12:1-2), or Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:3; Romans 16:5), or similar to the home of our single friend in Oregon, it was the show of hospitality itself which made the difference in the growth and depth of our student ministry.

During the eight years in which we met in our home, our format was simple and unchanging. My wife Katie cooked dinner for the students with a vegetarian option, and we started eating at 6:30. Students were free to take their tray of food to the living room, the front porch, the back porch, or the basement. Our oldest son, born in 2004, sat in the middle of students in his wooden highchair eating his dinner like anyone else. At 7:30 we moved to the basement, where we talked, worshipped, prayed and discussed the Bible. We seldom used any screens or digital technology. Though we ended at 9:00, a few students would stay as late as midnight to talk with us. In 2005, we began with about 10 students, and by the time we finished our ministry at Appalachian State in 2013, we were hosting 35-50 students on a weekly basis, all

according to the same format. We estimated that we served 5,000 meals to students during that time, all from an average-sized, no-frills, middle-class home with a small kitchen in need of renovation.

In addition to our Wednesday night Bible study dinners, we also held weekly book discussion groups, and met one-on-one with students over coffee. But over time, it became clear that the depth of relationship in our group started with time spent in our home. To this day, several years later, I am in contact with a significant percentage of these students on a regular basis, though most live hours away. A few refer to me as “Dad” or tell me they love me when they say goodbye on the phone. A frequent topic of conversation with these long-graduated students is the time spent eating, laughing, worshipping, and discussing scripture in our modest, middle-class home. It was the show of hospitality itself that spoke to the hearts of our students. Many former students speak of this time as a great highlight of their spiritual lives. Many others express the wish to return to such times. More than a few remark on the absence of a similar experience of Christian community and family in their spiritual lives after college.

But it is in relational connection that human beings find fulfillment, loving and being loved by God and neighbor according to the Christian tradition. Harvard Political Scientist Robert Putnam would agree, at least with the neighbor part: “the single most common finding from a half century’s research on the correlates of life satisfaction, not only in the United States but around the world, is that happiness is best predicted by the breadth and depth of one’s social connections.”<sup>3</sup> The effects of the decline of social connectedness, dissected with great precision in *Bowling Alone*, are keenly felt by today’s youth in America, resulting in perhaps the greatest problem facing our youth today.

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3. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 332.

### The Problem in Detail: A Cultural Analysis

More than just young people, Americans in general are starved for human interaction, and this isolation quite literally may be killing us. As Jean Twenge, a psychologist at San Diego State University, argues in *Generation Me*, “Today, the lifetime rate of major depression is ten times higher (than Americans born before 1915)—between 15% and 20%.”<sup>4</sup> This means that Americans today have far greater rates of depression than the generations who went through World War I, World War II and the Great Depression. “Twice as many people reported symptoms of panic attacks in 1995 compared to 1980, and 40% more people said they’d felt an impending nervous breakdown in 1996 than had in 1957.”<sup>5</sup> To Twenge, a primary factor in such depression statistics is the diminishing value of American community life. More than four times as many Americans describe themselves as lonely now than in 1957. Quoting political scientist Robert Lane, she writes, “There is a kind of famine of warm interpersonal relations, of easy-to-reach neighbors, of encircling, inclusive memberships, and of solid family life.”<sup>6</sup> To take the analogy a little further, we’re malnourished from eating a junk-food diet of text messages, e-mail, and phone calls, rather than the healthy food of live, in-person interaction.

Americans are truly a lonely people. In his book *Bowling Alone*, political science professor Robert Putnam uses an impressive collection of statistics to demonstrate how American communal life has been in decline for many decades. Putnam relates statistics regarding individual involvement in politics, religious life, and volunteer organizations, among

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4. Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today’s Young Americans are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled-and More Miserable than Ever Before* (New York: Atria Books, 2007), 105.

5. Jean Twenge, *Generation Me*, 107.

6. Jean Twenge, *Generation Me*, 110.

others. This decline in American community life has taken place for several different reasons, according to Putnam. For one, the locus of American life seems to have moved from the home to the workplace. Putnam writes, “Work is where the hearth is, then, for many solitary souls.”<sup>7</sup> Perhaps this development would not be so troublesome if work relationships made up for the loss of family and marital life, but, as Putnam, notes, it seems that, “most studies of personal networks find that co-workers account for less than 10 percent of our friends. Workplace ties tend to be casual and enjoyable, but not intimate and deeply supportive.”<sup>8</sup>

In close relationship to the topic of hospitality, *Bowling Alone* offers statistical observations on the family meal in America. While these statistics are traced only through the meal habits of married couples, they are nonetheless startling. “The fraction of married Americans who say ‘definitely’ that ‘our whole family usually eats dinner together’ has declined by a third over the last twenty years, from about 50 percent to 34 percent.”<sup>9</sup> But the family meal is just one declining aspect of American family life among many others. Putnam concludes a chapter on social connections by stating, “the last several decades have witnessed a striking diminution of regular contacts with our friends and neighbors. We spend less time in conversation over meals, we exchange visits less often, we engage less often in leisure activities that encourage casual social interaction...We know our neighbors less well, and we see old friends less often.”<sup>10</sup>

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7. Robert Putnam, 86.

8. Robert Putnam, 87.

9. Robert Putnam, 100.

10. Robert Putnam, 115.

Putnam names several culprits for this decline in American community life. Busyness, economic hardship, and the advent of both husbands and their wives in the American workplace are all listed as reasons why this is so.<sup>11</sup> Other smaller reasons include what Putnam terms “mobility and sprawl.”<sup>12</sup> A more significant culprit for the decline in social life, however, is the change in the average American’s use of their leisure time, particularly in watching television. “Nothing else in the twentieth century,” he writes, “so rapidly and profoundly affected our leisure.”<sup>13</sup> “More television watching means less of virtually every form of civic participation and social involvement.”<sup>14</sup> The viewing of a screen amplifies our communal disconnectedness.

Today, television screens are but a small problem compared to the proliferation of digital media since the publishing of *Bowling Alone* in 2001. The progression of the power of digital communication technology has drastically changed our lives since the 1980’s, when personal computers in homes began to be commonplace. Since the 1990’s, the internet has grown ever more expansive and more accessible, putting the whole world at the touch of a button, first on a desktop, then on a laptop, and finally into ever-present handheld devices. Now we have smartphones with more memory and faster processing speeds than our laptops once had, connected at all times with the worldwide web. And the effect of this technology in relational terms is obvious when parents and children at restaurants, lost in the world of their own individual screens, ignore one another, or a college professor enters to a roomful of silent students immersed in their devices. As Robert Putnam warns, American community life has been

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11. Robert Putnam, 203.

12. Robert Putnam, 215.

13. Robert Putnam, 221.

14. Robert Putnam, 228.

steadily on the decline for decades, but it seems as if the slope is only growing steeper in the internet age.

No one, it seems, will be impacted quite like today's teenagers, born in an era when the internet is ever present. Putnam's statistics clarify the power of hospitable welcome that my wife and I received at the home of a single mother and her kids, as well as reveal the significance of eating a home-cooked meal in a real home in our campus ministry. Perhaps young adults were drawn to our ministry model because their cultural experiences left them hungry for an authentic connection with other people that was lacking in their lives. Again, Americans in general are beset with loneliness, but the blunt edge of our lonesome technological age seems to be felt most keenly by our youth.

San Diego State University Psychologist Jean Twenge has dubbed the newest generation of young people "iGen," distinguishing them from what most call "Millennials" or "Generation Y."<sup>15</sup> Twenge writes, "iGen has arrived. Born in 1995 and later, they grew up with cell phones, had an Instagram page before they started high school, and do not remember a time before the Internet. The oldest members of iGen were early adolescents when the iPhone was introduced in 2007 and high school students when the iPad entered the scene in 2010."<sup>16</sup>

It is easy for those of previous generations who were raised without cell phones or the Internet to fail to grasp the unique ways in which these technologies have affected this younger generation. As Twenge notes, the Internet is a constant running feature of their lives. "The average teen checks her phone more than eighty times a day."<sup>17</sup> It can hardly be overstated that

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15. Jean M. Twenge *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy--and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood--and What That Means for the Rest of Us* (New York: Atria Books, 2007), 2.

16. Jean Twenge, *iGen*, p. 2.

17. Jean Twenge, *iGen*, p. 2.



this technological dynamic decreases the social presence of any young person, and can make them a stranger even to those who live in their own home. While the offering of a meal in a home to young adults was countercultural just a few years ago, it is increasingly the case today.

While Twenge's studies demonstrate numerous ways in which iGen is distinguishable from previous generations, what is most useful for the scope of this project is to focus on the sense of social isolation felt by members of iGen. Drawing from a series of surveys given to high school students for decades, Twenge isolates numerous characteristics of iGen which differentiate it from previous generations, including those only a few years older. Twenge notes that high school seniors spent twice as much time online in 2015 as those who came before them in 2006, just nine years prior.<sup>18</sup> Twenge also notes that screens have replaced faces, writing, "the number of teens who get together with their friends every day has been cut in half in just fifteen years, with especially steep declines recently."<sup>19</sup> According to Twenge, students are replacing social activities not with homework, but with digital media. This precipitous drop in social interaction correlates with the recent development of the widespread use of smartphones.

While the narrative of social media companies and other tech giants is that technology benefits the social lives of young people, statistics demonstrate otherwise. Twenge describes a study of 8th graders who spend ten plus hours on social media a week, finding that such students are "56% more likely to be unhappy than those who don't."<sup>20</sup> If one replaces screen time with friend time, the statistics reverse. Twenge writes, "those who spend more time with their friends in person are 20% less likely to be unhappy."<sup>21</sup> When the subject turns from "unhappiness" to

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18. Jean Twenge, *iGen*, 51-52.

19. Jean Twenge, *iGen*, 71.

20. Jean Twenge, *iGen*, 78.

21. Jean Twenge, *iGen*, 78.

the term “loneliness,” the results are the same. The more a young person spends in front of a screen and away from people, the more both loneliness and unhappiness increase.<sup>22</sup>

The replacement of in-person social interaction with smartphone use should not be considered a small development from a Christian theological perspective. Christians serve a Lord who came in the flesh to those who were flesh. During the incarnation, Christ shared personal conversations, touched people to heal them, ate meals with his disciples and others, and was often seemingly more interested in the small group of disciples who followed him than in the crowds. The dynamic of eating in a real home with real people, as we discovered in our campus ministry work, seems in retrospect to belong to an incarnational manner of doing ministry, and appears to be contrary to our culture’s obeisance to digital technology. Marva Dawn describes her skepticism regarding innovative technologies this way: “I am grateful for technological tools...The problem is that we become too enthralled with their advantages and don’t ask good questions about how much they take away from us.”<sup>23</sup>

Smartphones are ever present in contemporary American life. A large teen survey in 2017 found that three quarters of American teens own an iPhone.<sup>24</sup> This statistic is truly striking when you consider that it accounts for only one single brand of smartphone. In the short amount of time since smartphones became commonplace, the rates of depression and suicide among teens have rapidly grown, and Twenge convincingly correlates these statistics to make a connection.

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22. Jean Twenge, *iGen*, 97.

23. Marva Dawn and Eugene Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 210.

24. Jean M. Twenge “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?” *The Atlantic Monthly* (September 2017): <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/has-the-smartphone-destroyed-a-generation/534198/>

It would be one thing if such time spent in front of screens and away from personal interaction with their peers seemed beneficial. But this is not the case. More screen activities clearly contribute to an increase in both depression and suicide rates, and less screen activities lead to the opposite.<sup>25</sup> Studies have shown that those teens who spend three or more hours a day in front of a screen (excepting television but including other electronic media) are 35 percent more prone to exhibit suicidal behavior.<sup>26</sup>

Agreeing with Twenge about the problem of digitally-induced social isolation is writer John Gorman, who insists that the term “social media” is a misnomer, as it emphasizes an inauthentic and virtual socializing over an authentic and personal socializing. In his article for *Medium*, Gorman describes the reasons he has stopped using social media. Beginning with the addictive properties of social media, Gorman writes, “For what’s felt like an eternity, I felt a need to be seen. And for a long time, I quenched the thirst by posting incessantly to social media. 20,000 Facebook posts. 50,000 tweets...I became lonely, because I realized that the real me had vanished and fled to unreachable, unknowable depths.”<sup>27</sup> Ironically, the desire to avoid being alone led Gorman to social media, but the use of social media amplified his loneliness.

Social media, in Gorman’s view, magnifies a false sense of self, not just for himself but for everyone on social media. The technology of the smartphone is a serious culprit in this dynamic, which Gorman notes as he describes how, with social media, we have transformed our smartphone “into a screening app through which we can exhaustively filter, delete, edit and tune

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25. Jean Twenge. “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?”

26. Jean Twenge. “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?”

27. John Gorman, “Why I Quit Social Media,” *Medium* (February 10, 2018): <https://medium.com/personal-growth/why-i-quit-social-media-4d97e9a81951>.

out the life we used to see through our own eyes and process in our own hearts.”<sup>28</sup> It is useful to contrast this selective filtering with the approach of our single mom friend, who invited us over to her unfiltered home, giving us a glimpse into her real life, and starting a deep friendship that has endured.

Techspeak is filled with relational terms for technology that are often far less than relational. On social media, one has numerous “friends,” which are often relationships actually shallower than an acquaintance, or “followers,” which, biblically speaking, has been used as a definition for the New Testament word μαθητης, typically translated “pupil,” “apprentice,” “disciple,” or “adherent.”<sup>29</sup> What an advantage a shared meal would seem to hold over such advanced technology, especially in a home. To look across one’s table at a real face in a real home is deeply relational.

Sherry Turkle, a sociology and psychology professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, describes in her book *Alone Together: Why we Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* how our technology has shaped us more than we think. Examining the human impact of computers, she writes, “how were computers changing us as people? My colleagues often objected, insisting that computers were ‘just tools.’ But I was certain that the ‘just’ in that sentence was deceiving. We are shaped by our tools.”<sup>30</sup>

Being wired is, in many ways, wonderful, as we have all found when checking a weather radar, or navigating to a child’s sporting event. But there are consequences. We are becoming

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28. John Gorman. “Why I Quit Social Media.”

29. Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 609.

30. Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why we Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), x.

addicted to our phones, constantly checking email, or completely immersed in a game, or frequently reading articles on sports and politics for long stretches, as I am prone to do. The relational effects of being constantly wired are well-noted by Turkle. She writes, “Networked, we are together, but so lessened are our expectations of each other that we can feel utterly alone.”<sup>31</sup>

As an adjunct professor teaching primarily first-year students, it is perplexing to know what to do in regard to students becoming constantly distracted by their devices in class, a problem Turkle addresses as well.<sup>32</sup> I have disallowed smartphone use during class, but they are ever present anyway. In one case a student literally answered a phone call aloud during a class session. In another case, I was astonished to hear the voice of a virtual assistant announce the answer to an exam question during a class final exam. Notwithstanding the violation of the honor code, I have grown weary of correcting such students in class, and have started to email them outside of class to remind them that the next time I see them on their phones, they will receive an absence for the day.

The lengths to which students go to remain connected are not signs of some moral defect, but of strong technological habits unlikely to die soon, and these habits are not just important in terms of classroom manners and the learning environment; they are essential to students’ relational well-being. In some ways, the draw of students to smartphones is due to a desire to connect relationally, but the technology itself affects the manner of such relational connection. More than simply re-wiring the manner in which we communicate, our wired lives may prevent us the option of more authentic communication in favor of something far less effective. Gregory

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31. Sherry Turkle, 154.

32. Sherry Turkle, 163.

Spencer, a professor of communication studies at Westmont College, suggests that our inability to relate well to others is a product of cultural hurriedness, amplified by communication technology. Spencer argues that the values of time are trending upward in contemporary American society, concurrent with a general deemphasizing of space. Spencer defines the values of time as “the need to respond quickly,” and the values of space as “a focus on those in our presence.”<sup>33</sup>

Drawing on the wisdom of the late Neil Postman, Spencer encourages us to evaluate our use of technology and how it affects our relationships, rather than merely accept the newest technological offers without a hint of critical reflection. Interestingly, Spencer connects our tendency to prioritize our phones over people to hospitality, writing, “since proxemics (the role of space in communication) is not a perceived priority, an ethic of hospitable presence is understated. We would do well to recover our commitment to engagement with others.”<sup>34</sup> Spencer notices that we are on our phones at church, in meetings, in nature, at meals, and even in the carpool line picking up our kids.<sup>35</sup> Because our devices frequently pull us away from relational connection, he suggests that we commit ourselves to “hospitable presence,” which is the intention of this thesis-project.

But are the blessings of hospitable presence the very reason we avoid prioritizing those within our relational space? Spencer states, “one tragic irony of our times is that these benefits are the very reasons we avoid deeper presence.”<sup>36</sup> Students often text rather than talk because

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33. Gregory Spencer, “Time is up and Space is Down,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 10, no. 1 (2017): 105.

34. Gregory Spencer, “Time is up and Space is Down,” 108.

35. Gregory Spencer, “Time is up and Space is Down,” 108.

36. Gregory Spencer, “Time is up and Space is Down,” 110.

they are intimidated by the relational presence of others, and seem to find a retreat from the stress of that presence in a smartphone screen. Listing the four suggested benefits offered by hospitable presence, Spencer writes, “the costs of undivided attention, spontaneity, wholeness and empathy seem overwhelming and frightening.”<sup>37</sup> These benefits seem to manifest themselves more fully in what Spencer terms “private hospitality.”<sup>38</sup> If, as Spencer suggests, “meaningful conversation is one of life’s greatest goods and highest pleasures,”<sup>39</sup> then what better place to have such conversations than in a private home over a meal? Sharing a meal is by itself meaningful, but the meaning is amplified when the setting is a home, rather than a restaurant. Hospitality seems to contain the ingredients which might assuage the loneliness of living in a technologically connected though socially disconnected world.

### **The Project: Spiritual Formation and Hospitality**

Perhaps some of the default ministry methods in contemporary Evangelicalism are under the microscope in these critiques of modern technological society. Why is it that we, who always talk about a “personal relationship with Jesus Christ” often share the gospel, or operate our churches, in an impersonal manner? One can argue there is nothing inherently wrong with using technology in the form of church websites or smart phone applications, or creating large and technologically sophisticated ministry events. But by pursuing technology over in-person interaction, or working to create more and larger event-based ministries, are we missing the opportunity to develop the relationships necessary to lead a life of relational fulfillment and grow

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37. Gregory Spencer, “Time is up and Space is Down,” 110.

38. Gregory Spencer, “Time is up and Space is Down,” 111.

39. Gregory Spencer, “Time is up and Space is Down,” 112.

in our collective spiritual life? Perhaps we are offering events to attend, but with little relational connection or sense of belonging; without a sense of “home.” And for first-year college students, “home” is the place they have left, or perhaps have never deeply experienced.

Having experienced the benefits of hospitality, both personally and as a college minister, and now serving as an instructor of spiritual formation at a Christian college, it seemed fitting to organize my thesis-project around how American college students, who are afflicted with a strong sense of relational disconnection, could be positively affected by Christian hospitality in the context of a course on spiritual formation. So, the following research question emerged: Is the largely lost biblical practice of hospitality an effective means of communicating spiritual truth at a deeper level to millennial youth and younger generations in America, who were raised in an age of unprecedented relational isolation?

The problems of a technologically wired, relationally-deprived age were the problems to which the graduates of our Appalachian State student ministry referred when they longed for their college days and the sense of community experienced together in our home. Though many campus ministries offer an event-based model which makes excellent use of technology to attract large numbers of students, many students I have spoken to were only casually involved in those ministries, often attending only two or three times per semester. These students, though worshipping at the large group events hosted by larger ministries, found their friendships and sense of community elsewhere. What distinguished our smaller ministry at Appalachian State was not dynamic preaching or excellent music, but a simple feeling of family, which, in many cases, was missing from students’ personal lives. By eating in our home, playing with our children, and participating in authentic and intimate worship, the hearts of students were opened to God in a unique manner.



The goal of this project is to provide a similar environment for first-semester college students in the context of a course on spiritual formation. In my experience, hospitality and the community it builds can create situations in which there are deep friendships and considerable spiritual growth, particularly when the opportunity for continued connection between people exists. Hospitality and community create an open door for conversations, where people can ask questions, and receive prayer, guidance and encouragement. Therefore, the central hypothesis of this project will be that the lost biblical practice of hospitality is an effective way to amplify the communication of spiritual truth at a deeper level to present-day college students, raised in a technologically-wired but relationally-deprived age. To test that hypothesis I will work to provide a consistent offering of personal Biblical hospitality to undergraduate students in the fall of 2018.

In the fall semester of 2018, I teach two sections of a class required for all students at Toccoa Falls College, Foundations of Spiritual Formation. This class is generally taken by first-semester freshmen and transfer students. Therefore, it is a good context for observing students in a new environment where they most likely have few existing social contacts. I will teach identical material in the two class sections. Two or three weeks after the first day of class, I will provide an anonymous survey to all students in both classes, measuring attitudes toward the class material, the class, and spiritual growth experienced by the student. This survey will also ask questions about the student's experiences with hospitality during adolescence, seeking to understand the students' experiences of relational connectedness with other Christians during their upbringing. This part of the survey will allow me as the researcher to better understand the students, how they think and what they have experienced. A second part of the survey given at the beginning of the semester will ask questions about the student's feelings of relational

closeness to their fellow students, their spiritual mentors, and to God. This second part of the survey will be used again at the end of the semester.

It will be key to provide an opportunity for Christian hospitality to these students. Therefore, all the students in both class sections will be invited to attend dinners weekly on Sunday nights throughout the semester at the professor's home, along with his family. There will be no academic credit given for attendance, and the dinners will be entirely optional, with free home cooked meals and rides provided. Some students will choose to attend, either regularly or occasionally, while others will not, allowing for comparison of survey material.

At the end of the semester, another survey will be handed out to all students in both class sections. I will keep the surveys anonymous while connecting the first survey with the second survey for each individual student. The second survey will ask students if they attended dinner at the professor's house, how many times, and how this experience of being in the professor's home affected their experience of the Spiritual Formation class. Answers from those who attended dinner at the professor's home will be contrasted with answers from students who were unable to attend on Sunday nights. In addition, students will again take the second part of the survey from the beginning of the semester which covers attitudes toward the class material, the class, and the spiritual growth experienced by the student, along with questions probing the student's feelings of relational closeness to their fellow students, spiritual mentors, and God. This will allow me to get a sense of how a show of hospitality was able to influence both the individual student's class experiences as well as the student's spiritual life. In addition to these surveys, I will, at the end of the semester conduct an optional focus group interview with several student volunteers who were able to frequently attend dinner in our home, gaining insight into

how a showing of hospitable welcome affected their experience of the Spiritual Formation class itself as well as their own spiritual lives.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY

#### **Hospitality Defined**

For the purpose of this chapter, it will be helpful to define Biblical hospitality in a holistic manner before examining the various manifestations of hospitality in Scripture. Biblical hospitality, therefore, may be understood as the demonstration of love for God by specific acts of love for neighbor through the meeting of basic physical and relational needs. Though Christian hospitality is normally demonstrated in scripture by humans toward other humans, Biblical hospitality as a human action is a reflection of God's initial acts of hospitality to his people. In the Exodus, for example, God manifests His love by meeting his people's physical needs for food, water, freedom and safety; and He expects His people to do so for others. It is worth noting that Scripture places significant emphasis on the demonstration of hospitality to strangers, not just neighbors one might happen to know. For example, in one important episode in the history of God's people, which sets a pattern for future acts of hospitality, Abraham ends up showing hospitality to God Himself by offering it to strangers.

#### **Hospitality in the New Testament**

While the Old Testament features a significant undercurrent of hospitality running through its narratives, there is, oddly enough, no Hebrew word which is translated "hospitality" in our English texts. In the New Testament, however, the Koine Greek noun φιλοξενία, which literally means "love of strangers," is commonly translated "hospitality."<sup>1</sup> Φιλοξενία, and the

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1. Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, eds., *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 400.

related adjective φιλοξενος, are used five times in the New Testament,<sup>2</sup> while a similar word, ξενοδοχεω, which connotes showing hospitality to guests, is used once.<sup>3</sup> Together, these passages suggest that showing love to guests and strangers by sharing one's resources within the context of the home is an important New Testament virtue, particularly for those in positions of leadership.

In his letter to Timothy, Paul lists being “hospitable” as an essential characteristic of an επισκοπος, or overseer, in the church (1 Timothy 3:2), a requirement he reiterates in Titus 1:8. Being “hospitable” is also a necessary qualification for the πρεσβυτερος, or elder. In 1 Timothy chapter 5, writing of widows who qualify for practical support from the church, Paul states that one criterion for determining which widow receives support is that she has shown hospitality. Furthermore, in Romans 12, Paul commands the members of that church to “contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.”<sup>4</sup> Later in Romans 16:23, Paul honors Gaius, who served as “host” to both Paul and to the Roman church itself. Susan Schaeffer Macaulay, daughter of Francis and Edith Schaeffer, who founded the hospitality-based ministry L’Abri, echoes Paul’s words on being hospitable: “In all societies, to be invited into a home for a meal is the greatest sign of friendliness. “To be given to hospitality” means we have a welcoming home to share.”<sup>5</sup>

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2. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1058.

3. Aland, 684.

4. Romans 12:13. All scripture references are taken from the English Standard Version of the Bible unless otherwise indicated.

5. Susan Schaeffer Macaulay, *For the Family's Sake: The Value of Home in Everyone's Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 52.

Paul also sees the value of hospitality in dealing not just with those one wishes to befriend, but even enemies. Quoting Proverbs 25:21-22, Paul writes in Romans 12

18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." 20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.<sup>6</sup>

An illustration of these words being applied took place at several Christian colleges across the nation in 2006, when gay rights activists from Souforce Equality Ride sought to protest on campuses where Biblical standards of sexuality were expected of students. A *Christianity Today* editorial entitled "The Power of Hospitality," tells the story,

Christian colleges rolled out the welcome mat. Several offered the riders food and housing during their stay. Many offered to host open forums and panel discussions, with faculty and students offering counterpoints to the protesters' claims that Paul didn't understand homosexuality and that students at these schools were oppressed. Time and again, Souforce's claims about the schools (that they automatically toss out any gay students and that closeted students are in danger if they come out) were shown to be false. After a while, reporters stopped showing up.<sup>7</sup>

New Testament teaching on hospitality is by no means limited to the writings of Paul. In a general list of commands to brothers and sisters in the church, the Apostle Peter clearly states, "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling."<sup>8</sup> And the author of Hebrews commands his readers to extend this love even to strangers: "Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."<sup>9</sup> Apparently,

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6. Romans 12:18-21.

7. *Christianity Today* Editorial Board. "The Power of Hospitality: How to win over enemies and influence people," *Christianity Today* (June 1, 2006): 23.

8. 1 Peter 4:8-9.

9. Hebrews 13:1-2.

showing hospitality to strangers by loving, feeding, or clothing them, creates the possibility that one is literally caring for a supernatural guest, as Abraham once did. Perhaps the author of Hebrews had the incident on the road to Emmaus in mind as well, though the Emmaus encounter was with Jesus himself, as opposed to an angel. Two disciples of Jesus, following ancient patterns of Middle Eastern hospitality, invite an (unbeknownst to them) divine stranger into their home and share bread with him at the table.<sup>10</sup> Then as they see the stranger break bread they somehow know the mysterious guest to be Christ Himself, perhaps remembering the Last Supper or even at the feeding of the 5,000.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, Jesus' statement to his Pharisee host in Luke 14 points to the importance of showing hospitality to strangers in need, especially those who are not a part of one's circle of family and friends. As Jesus states in Luke 14,

12 ... "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. 13 But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."<sup>12</sup>

In this statement Jesus draws a contrast between one set of guests, people of prominence with a relational connection to the host, and a second set, who are poor, crippled, and blind, and who are almost certainly not connected to the host in any manner. While hospitality can be shown to both a neighbor who is known and a neighbor who is unknown, there is an emphasis in Scripture on the demonstration of love for God through specific acts of compassion for the unknown

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10. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary Revised Edition, Luke-Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 348.

11. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary Revised Edition, Luke-Acts*, 348.

12. Luke 14:12-14.

stranger, through the meeting of basic physical and relational needs. This is consistent with the definition of the word φιλοξενία.

*The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* describes Matthew 25:31-46 as “The most important passage for the Christian tradition of hospitality to strangers,” adding that “it is clear that entry into the kingdom is tied to the practice of hospitality in this life.”<sup>13</sup> Such hospitality is intended, as Jesus says in Matthew 25:40 for those described as “one of the least of these my brothers.”<sup>14</sup> To give a hungry stranger food, to provide a thirsty stranger drink, to show the stranger welcome, to clothe the stranger with clothing, and to visit him in prison, is to show this same hospitality to Christ Himself. These strangers are either in need of basic physical necessities, or the comfort of human presence, as in the case of the stranger in need of welcome or the prisoner in need of a visit. No other characteristics of these needy strangers are named by Jesus; they need not be fellow countrymen, friends, or family members. In fact, some have argued that they need not even be fellow believers. But whether believing or unbelieving, strangers or neighbors, one thing is certain: the command to care for those in need is not to be treated lightly, in fact, to fail to do so puts one in danger of divine judgment.

In his exposition on hospitality in the early church, Joshua Jipp, professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, notes many passages like Matthew 25 where the topic of hospitality is mentioned alongside that of salvation, concluding that “the early Christian texts...testify that hospitality to strangers was not an optional practice for the church, but something that is deeply related to salvation.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, in Matthew 25, those who did not

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13. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D.A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 561-563.

14. Matthew 25:40.



show hospitality to the vulnerable stranger were accused of showing no concern for Christ Himself, and were condemned to eternal fire alongside the devil and his demons. By demonstrating one's devotion to the vulnerable stranger, devotion was shown to God Himself. In other words, the distinguishing characteristic which separates the sheep from the goats is whether or not the individual shows loving concern for the needy.

Joshua Jipp also argues that Jesus' own table practices set a clear standard for subsequent attitudes toward Christian hospitality when he writes,

One of the major marks of Jesus's table-practices is his indiscriminate and non-calculating offer of hospitality to all people, and this might easily seem to conflict with Jewish heroes who separated themselves from impure people and their food. Instead, Jesus eats with tax collectors, a sinful woman, two women, the poor and ritually unclean, his disciples, and even with the Pharisees. It is no surprise, then, that Israel's religious leaders are said to have taken offense and complain about the guests to whom Jesus extends hospitality. Jesus is tangibly extending God's friendship to those who, in the eyes of others, are not righteous, have a low status, and are viewed as unworthy of friendship with God.<sup>16</sup>

Jipp makes the point that this kind of hospitality is something which is graciously extended by Jesus to all the people of his day, regardless of nationality, age or religious grouping—young or old, man or woman, Jew or Gentile. So, if one claims to follow and love such a Lord, then that person should demonstrate love to others the way Jesus Himself did, particularly in showing compassion to vulnerable people from all walks of life. The one who does not show such hospitality shows little sign that he has truly experienced the saving grace of God.

A New Testament study of hospitality demonstrates that Christ both showed hospitality to others as well as received it as he set a pattern for Christian practice. But in the Last Supper

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15. Joshua W. Jipp, *Saved by Faith and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 7.

16. Jipp, 23.

Jesus added another dimension to a Christian understanding of hospitality. As Rodney Duke points out in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Jesus serves as both the host and the substance at the eucharistic meal. In partaking of communion, therefore, Christians become the recipients of Christ's hospitality, as the disciples did at the Last Supper.<sup>17</sup> Christians are also to follow their Lord in acting as host and showing hospitality to others. As Christians, we offer bread to our neighbors as a reflection of the truth that Christ offered Himself to all mankind as the bread of life. As The *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* states, "In a general sense, Christians now serve as co-hosts with Christ to a world consisting of those who are 'excluded from the citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise.' (Eph. 2:12)"<sup>18</sup>

Luke, in his gospel, seems particularly interested in the topic of hospitality, as seen already in the Parable of the Great Banquet in Luke 14. Luke's interest in hospitality is also evident in the parable of the Good Samaritan, a unique Lukan text and the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10. As the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* points out, several passages in Luke's Gospel also show that "(Jesus) and his disciples were dependent on the hospitality and support of others. (Luke 8:1-3; 9:1-6; 10:3-12, 38-42)"<sup>19</sup> Perhaps Luke highlights hospitality in the Gospel because he noticed, as author of Acts, how prominent hospitality was in the growth of the early church, which met initially in homes and centered around a eucharistic fellowship meal. The *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* states that "the earliest Christian fellowship and church growth depended on household-based hospitality among believers. The first missionaries

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17. Rodney Duke, "Hospitality," *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1996), 361.

18. Rodney Duke, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 361.

19. *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 562.

travelled widely and found a welcome in various homes (Acts 16:15, 32-34; 18:1-11), which also provided meeting places for the local community of believers.”<sup>20</sup> As a Gentile, Luke would not have normally been welcome in the home of a practicing Jew in first century Palestine. Perhaps, then, Luke’s outsider status also explains why the expression of Christian hospitality was so significant to him.

It is worth noting that most New Testament hospitality was expressed and experienced in the context of a home. This is a challenge to Christians today, who have found a multitude of methods for providing for the material needs of strangers without ever using our living spaces. We may buy a restaurant meal for a family, or host a baby shower at the church fellowship hall, or serve meals at a soup kitchen for the homeless. While these are all good expressions of love and generosity, this lack of a home context diminishes the personal nature of our acts of love and service for others.

Indeed, the home was central to the early church. This is very clearly seen in Luke’s account of the early church in the book of Acts. Luke writes in chapter 2,

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to meeting in the temple courts, the early church met in homes, where meals were shared, meals which led to prayers of praise to God,<sup>22</sup> as well as to a favorable reputation for

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20. *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 563.

21. Acts 2:42-47.

22. Acts 2:46-47.

Christians outside the church community. The use of a home is essential, therefore, to this thesis-project, rather than a borrowed church fellowship hall or Sunday school classroom. A home setting personalizes the gift of food. Furthermore, I believe that the effectiveness of the project would be diminished if the home used did not belong to me.

Acts features the homes of believers rather prominently. In addition to Acts chapter 2, Acts 5:42 describes how the apostles taught the gospel message to new believers in both the Jerusalem temple and in homes. In Acts chapter 10, Peter, a Jew, demonstrates his understanding that the gospel is for all nations by entering the home of the Gentile and Roman Captain Cornelius, despite Peter stating in verse 28, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation.”<sup>23</sup> Cornelius and his entire family are baptized by the Holy Spirit in their home with Peter present, and invite him to stay several days. In Acts 16, Paul and Silas receive hospitality from the jailer after their miraculous release from prison. Verses 33-34 describes how the jailer washes the wounds of Paul and Silas and sets food before them. Paul and Silas then preach to the jailer and his family, and baptize each family member. Also in Acts 16, the dealer of purple cloth in Philippi, Lydia, becomes a believer and invites Paul and Silas into her home, showing the two weary missionaries hospitality.

Eventually, Lydia’s home became a gathering place for Christian believers in Philippi. In fact, the biblical evidence suggests that all of the earliest Christian congregations met in homes.

As the *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments* states,

Both literary and nonliterary evidence points to the domestic residence as the venue for early Christian gatherings...The gathering of Christian believers in private homes continue to be the norm until the early decades of the fourth century, when Constantine began erecting the first Christian basilicas. For almost three hundred years the believers met in homes, not in synagogues or edifices constructed for the sole purpose of religious assembly.<sup>24</sup>

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23. Acts 10:28.

This article goes on to suggest four reasons that churches met in member's homes. First, the homes were "immediately available;"<sup>25</sup> second, they were hidden places of meeting to protect against persecution;<sup>26</sup> third, meeting in a house followed the Jewish pattern of meeting in synagogues located in homes;<sup>27</sup> and fourth, a home, which would have contained some semblance of a kitchen, would have provided a good location for serving the eucharistic meal.<sup>28</sup>

Homes were likely used as churches until around 250.<sup>29</sup> The homes used were often those of wealthier church members, who would have had a larger home and perhaps also the means to purchase supplies for serving the Eucharist to gathered church members. Excavations of residential areas in Jerusalem have revealed rather extensive living spaces located in villas belonging to upper class families in the city in the first century.<sup>30</sup> The size of such homes would have been sufficient to host the size churches mentioned in Acts and the Pauline letters.<sup>31</sup>

Wealthy benefactors of the time were often recruited by Paul to use their homes to host churches, as seen in Acts 18 with Titius Justus and in Acts 16 with Lydia, the dealer of purple cloth.<sup>32</sup> This enabled the house church to be a wonderful place of hospitality, where love for God

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24. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, eds., *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 91.

25. *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments*, 92.

26. *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments*, 92.

27. *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments*, 92.

28. *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments*, 92.

29. *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments*, 92.

30. *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments*, 93.

31. *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments*, 93.

32. *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments*, 93.

was demonstrated in the offering of love to neighbor by meeting relational needs in fellowship and both physical and spiritual needs in the eucharistic meal. The offering of home for worship fostered close connections between strangers, who would have been culturally alienated as members of different ethnicities or social classes. In the context of this project, my home is no mansion; it is a solidly middle-class home. And yet, to a college student in a dormitory room, my family's home offers comfortable furniture, home-cooked food, and the presence of a Christian family. A home helps to relationally connect students to each other and to their professor as we eat a meal of fellowship. In so doing, not only is this project intended to be in keeping with a biblical definition of hospitality, but this project also aims to be deliberately connected to a New Testament concept of the house church.

### **Hospitality in the Old Testament**

There is a clear connection between the theology of hospitality in the New Testament and a theology of hospitality in the Old Testament. Though there is no Hebrew word corresponding to φιλοξενία in the Old Testament, the principle of hospitality is nonetheless highlighted in numerous passages. As the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* states: "Although there is no word for hospitality in the Hebrew vocabulary, the practice is evident in the welcome, food, shelter and protection-asylum that guests received in OT times."<sup>33</sup> If hospitality is the "love of strangers," then this concept easily translates to the treatment of foreigners in the midst of the people of Israel. Showing kindness to strangers is commanded in the law, in Deuteronomy 10:17-19, for example: "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the

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33. *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 561.

fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.”<sup>34</sup> Love and hospitality should be shown to the “sojourner” because the Israelites once held the same status in Egypt. The *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* also emphasizes that Old Testament hospitality cannot be reduced to an offer of food, but may include housing or clothing as well.<sup>35</sup> In fact, the Old Testament has a rather comprehensive view of the acts that comprise hospitality, in a manner much like the New Testament description of hospitality.

At times in the Old Testament, God is the recipient of man’s hospitality, similar to Jesus’s words in Matthew 25, or to Hebrews 13:2, which states, “do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”<sup>36</sup> Indeed, it seems as if the writer of Hebrews is making an explicit reference to the Old Testament story of Abraham and his three guests from Genesis 18.<sup>37</sup> Though the text indicates in verse 1 of Genesis 18 that it is the Lord who visits Abraham, this does not appear to be readily evident to Abraham, who, in keeping with his cultural tradition, provides food (the finest he has to offer), shelter in the form of shade, and water to wash the feet of his guests. Abraham receives assurance that his wife will have a son, and a restatement of God’s blessing that he will become a great nation. As the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* comments, “In most of the OT stories, guests brought

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34. Deuteronomy 10:17-19.

35. Rodney Duke, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 360.

36. Hebrews 13:2.

37. *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 561.

their hosts into close contact with God, but this often resulted in other forms of blessing as well: a longed-for child; marriage; protection....”<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps the story of Abraham showing hospitality in Genesis 18 has a contemporary parallel. Evelyne Reisacher, a professor of Islamic Studies at Fuller Seminary, sees hospitality as a key strategy in which Christians can engage Muslims in healthy conversation, in an age of political divisions between Christians and Muslims in both the United States and Europe. She highlights three different individual examples of hospitable engagement of Muslims by Christians, including Louis Massignon, a French Catholic and Islamicist of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Massignon’s experience of hospitality by a Muslim Family in Baghdad was profoundly influential in his life, causing him to develop his practice of “sacred hospitality.”<sup>39</sup> Massignon developed this practice in part by his reading of Genesis 18, where Abraham demonstrated hospitality to the three mysterious visitors, providing them food, drink and shade. Massignon applied the lessons of Genesis 18 to his “sacred hospitality,” allowing relational bridges to be built between Christians and Muslims, even in the French-Algerian war in the 1960’s, where Massignon helped Muslim Algerian demonstrators recover the bodies of Muslims in Paris for appropriate Islamic burial.

Hospitality in the Pentateuch is not limited to Genesis. Much of the importance attributed to the practice of hospitality in the New Testament can be linked to the experience of the people of Israel in slavery in Egypt, and to their deliverance from slavery in the Exodus event.<sup>40</sup> In the Exodus it is God who shows hospitality to the people of Israel, and because of this showing of

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38. *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 561.

39. Evelyne Reisacher. “A Moratorium on Hospitality.” *Fuller Studio* (2018): <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/a-moratorium-on-hospitality>.

40. *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 562.



hospitality believers should be inspired to act hospitably. The Lord demonstrated His ability to provide for the people's needs as they made their way to the promised land in Canaan. Now, as former aliens at the mercy of their hosts in Egypt, the people of Israel are called to return the favor to guests in their own land, as seen in Deuteronomy chapter 10, which states,

17 For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. 18 He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. 19 Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.<sup>41</sup>

An attitude of love, with practical gifts of food and clothing are to be given to guests in the land of Israel.<sup>42</sup>

This awareness of the needs of aliens in their midst resulted in some unique features in Israelite law. The *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* states, "In the ancient Near East only Israel had explicit legislation protecting, and providing for, the resident alien. The command to love the alien parallels the command to love the neighbor."<sup>43</sup> The word "neighbor" is not without significance, particularly when one considers that Jesus specifically defines the foreign Samaritan as the neighbor in Jesus' parable in Luke 10, showing a desperate stranger hospitality. Rodney Duke, in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* concurs with the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, stating, "hospitality in the ancient world focused on the alien or stranger in need. The plight of aliens was desperate. They lacked membership in the community, be it tribe, city-state, or nation."<sup>44</sup> This hospitality was not common in the ancient world according to Duke: "In its literature, Israel alone seems to have included the foreign sojourner

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41. Deuteronomy 10:17-19.

42. *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 562.

43 *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 562.

44 Rodney Duke, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 359.

along with those other alienated persons who were to receive care: the widow, the orphan, and the poor.”<sup>45</sup> Such hospitable gestures toward foreigners in their land was a reflection of the care God showed to the Israelites in Egypt and on their way to the promised land.

In accordance with the *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Joshua Jipp points out that the Old Testament does not see hospitality as entertaining the elite. In the Old Testament, God chooses for Himself a rather undistinguished people group in the descendants of Abraham, who become the slaves of the Egyptians. Nevertheless, God shows hospitality to the destitute people of Israel. Jipp writes,

In Israel’s Scriptures, God is often portrayed as the host of Israel as he provides manna and quail in the wilderness (Exod. 16:4, 15; Num. 11:1-9; Deut. 8:3, 16; Pss. 78:24-38 and 105:40; Neh. 9:15), spreads a table of peace and divine nourishment for the Psalmist (Ps. 23), and, as the owner of the land, grants Israel the gift of benefiting from that land as his guests (Lev. 25:23).<sup>46</sup>

How could the spiritual descendants of those receiving without merit such favor from God deny similar treatment to those in desperation in their own contexts?

The history books of the Old Testament also display a strong theology of hospitality. In 1 Kings 17, as in many other Old Testament passages describing acts of hospitality, the Lord Himself offers hospitality to his people, this time to the prophet Elijah. At the advent of Elijah’s ministry in 1 Kings 17, Elijah predicts a drought to come upon Israel, while the Lord leads him to a brook east of the Jordan River, where He calls the ravens to bring the prophet bread and meat, morning and evening. In the same chapter, after the brook dries up during the drought, the Lord directs the prophet to a Gentile widow in Zarephath, a town in Phoenicia, where the desperate woman gives Elijah the last of her meager food rations. The widow of Zarephath, in

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<sup>45</sup> Rodney Duke, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 360.

<sup>46</sup> Jipp, 19.

showing hospitality to God's prophet, then finds her food stores miraculously replaced. This story is of no small scriptural significance, as it is referenced by Jesus himself in his sermon in the Nazareth synagogue in Luke 4:26. The widow of Zarephath's show of hospitality to the foreign prophet saves Elijah's life, as well as that of the widow herself and her son. In another show of divine hospitality to this greatest of Old Testament prophets, Elijah is on the run for his life following his display of faith at the altar on Mt. Carmel. Threatened by the king's wife, Jezebel, Elijah is weary and afraid, and lays down in the shade of a tree, praying for death. 1 Kings 19:4 reads,

4 And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." 5 And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." 6 And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. 7 And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you."<sup>47</sup>

Once again, God shows his hospitable love for Elijah through meeting of Elijah's basic physical and emotional needs.

Hospitality is not an insignificant theme in the prophets, either. In Isaiah, God challenges the fasting practices of people who cry out to God, "Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?"<sup>48</sup> In His answer, God indicts them for a lack of moral consistency, because they keep the outwardly devout practice of fasting, but fail to share their resources with the poor. God challenges Judah to show hospitality to those in need. 1 Kings 19 states,

6 Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the

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47. 1 Kings 19:6-7.

48. Isaiah 58:3.

naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? 8 Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.<sup>49</sup>

Righteousness is expressed not by ritual devotion but by practical love for the one in need, giving food and clothing, and inviting the stranger into one's home. Again, for the purpose of this project, it is one thing to share food with students, but another to lovingly share food in your own home as an act of love for God and for them.

### **Hospitality as Theology in Practice**

Theologically speaking, hospitality, according to Rodney Duke in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, is not only something God does, but is itself “an attribute of God.”<sup>50</sup> Duke refers to the sharing of food as a “gesture of intimacy” which God himself showed his people at many turns, e.g., to the elders of Israel in Exodus 24, or at the Last Supper between Jesus and his disciples.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps hospitality can be seen as an attribute of God in part because of God's own need for hospitality, for in Matthew 2, God the Son was an infant refugee escaping Herod the Great in Egypt. Whether or not hospitality is seen as an attribute of God, it is certainly an expression of his love and his mercy.

Hospitality is also closely connected to trinitarian theology according to Christine Pohl of Asbury Seminary. In an interview with Duke Divinity School's *Faith and Leadership*, Pohl describes a theology of hospitality in which Christians associate with those of a lower social class or status, and in which the Christian is willing not just to serve as host but as guest. *Faith and Leadership* states, “institutions are essential to the practice of hospitality, which Pohl says is

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49. Isaiah 58:6-8.

50. Rodney Duke, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 359.

51. Rodney Duke, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 360.

not simply a matter of pleasantries but of finding ways to identify with the experiences and perspectives of marginalized people. ‘One can’t claim the role of host all the time; ...it is a gift also to be willing to be guests and to share in people’s lives.’”<sup>52</sup> In her interview with *Faith and Leadership*, Pohl describes her previous misunderstanding of what hospitality is, a misunderstanding that seems common in American Christian culture. She states,

I didn’t start out understanding that hospitality was this robust practice. I thought of it more as entertaining, coffee and donuts or casseroles or whatever, but hospitality is significant when you look at the Scriptures. It’s significant, and it wasn’t coffee and donuts. It was struggling with Jews and Gentiles and how people were going to get along together and be in the church together and be one body.<sup>53</sup>

Hospitality as an act of love certainly meets physical needs for nourishment but it also helps to meet relational needs for unity and community with one’s neighbor, from whom one may be divided.

In addition to her description of hospitality as a way to bridge the gap between divided people groups, Pohl sees a connection between Christian hospitality and Trinitarian theology. Pohl states in the interview with *Faith and Leadership*, “the communion of the Trinity, the mutual indwelling and welcoming that you see there that spills out into our lives, the power of the Eucharist as an expression of welcome and then a reenactment of welcome over and over again—it seems to me that it just means that hospitality is absolutely central to the Christian faith.”<sup>54</sup> If the Godhead within the Trinity demonstrates love between three persons, a relational love into which believers are invited, then surely hospitality is an earthly demonstration of

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52. Christine D. Pohl, “Grace Enters with the Stranger,” *Faith and Leadership* (November 22, 2010): <https://www.faithandleadership.com/christine-d-pohl-grace-enters-stranger>.

53. Christine D. Pohl, “Grace Enters with the Stranger,” *Faith and Leadership*.

54. Pohl, “Grace Enters with the Stranger.” *Faith and Leadership*.

Trinitarian relational love in the life of the believer, poured out to those in need of sustenance or relationship.

For a religion in which loving God and loving others is the greatest commandment, hospitality as a relational gesture takes on great significance. Hospitality does not have the immediate allure of the latest in management or ministry innovations. It is simple, old-fashioned, and would not strike one as efficient. Indeed, one can hardly say that making relationships with others is something that can be quantified in terms of efficiency. But for observers of the greatest commandments, relationship is of the utmost importance. Duke Divinity School professor Richard Lischer, in a memoir of his first pastorate entitled *Open Secrets*, writes, “the pastor finds hidden spiritual meaning in ordinary practices, such as hospitality or friendship, and in normal life-cycle occurrences, like birth, sexual love, sickness, and death. The quality of any relationship is all important, and each is capable of transcendent meaning.”<sup>55</sup> The simple gesture of hospitality demonstrated by my single mother friend to my wife and me in seminary days indeed transcended normal day-to-day experience in its ability to create relationships for life. Truly, in showing hospitality, we as Christians share God’s offer of relationship to us with other people. We show love for God through acts of love for neighbor, meeting our neighbor’s physical and relational needs.

In his book *Saved by Faith and Hospitality*, Joshua Jipp examines hospitality both as an act of God toward man and as an act of man toward his neighbor. Jipp, describing his vision of biblical hospitality, writes,

God’s hospitality to us necessarily results in and creates hospitality to others. Divine hospitality elicits human hospitality. The singular foundation for our identity is God’s act in Christ of extending welcome, hospitality, and friendship to us. This divine welcome, a

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55. Richard Lischer, *Open Secrets* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001), 211.

welcome to us without consideration of individual or collective social worth or merit, draws us into the life of God and makes us God's family and friends.<sup>56</sup>

Jipp sees great opportunity for the implementation of Biblical hospitality in the lives of refugees living in America, a need taking on particular importance in an American moment of suspicion as our borders, and perhaps our hearts, become restricted. Jipp continues, "in other words, God's hospitality creates a community that embodies this hospitality both in its social composition and in its practices of continuously seeking opportunities to extend God's welcome to whoever are the strangers, the outcasts, the vulnerable, and the stereotyped in our context."<sup>57</sup> Jipp highlights the subject of hospitality through the narrative of scripture, writing as follows,

...from the very first pages of the Bible we encounter the hospitable Abraham (Gen. 18:1-8), apostles exhorting their churches to show hospitality to strangers (see, for example, Rom. 12:13; Hebrews 13:2-3; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:9), and the church frequently portrayed as hospitably receiving itinerant missionaries and sending them on their way (see, for instance, Rom. 16:23; Col 4:10). But the importance of the church's practice of hospitality to stranger depends upon the broader way in which the early church understood itself to be recipients of God's hospitality and thereby agents of hospitality to one another.<sup>58</sup>

Therefore, for Christians to be the benefactors of such hospitality from God means they will show love to their neighbor by doing the same, which creates a human to human parallel of the relational healing that God has gifted to man. Jipp writes, "God's hospitality, the saving welcome that reconciles us to God and heals us, is the singular answer to our fractured relationship with God and with others."<sup>59</sup> Indeed, this act of reconciliation, both of man's relationship to God and of man's relationship to his neighbor, is reflected in the communion

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56. Jipp, 177.

57. Jipp, 177.

58. Jipp, 3.

59. Jipp, 36.

meal,<sup>60</sup> a reality perhaps most fully reflected in the Gospel of John.<sup>61</sup> What Jesus offers us in the Eucharist is what we need—bread and wine as sustenance—but with what Jipp, in a manner comparable to Lischer above, calls “transcendence.”<sup>62</sup> Similarly, a hospitable meal offered to the stranger is more than just consumed calories. This is a meal with meaning. Jipp writes, “John speaks of God’s hospitality as mediated through the life-giving, experiential realities that all of humanity craves and needs in order to flourish: water, wine, bread, home, and friendship.”<sup>63</sup>

But hospitality shown in one’s home can be difficult, of course. Many Christians, when thinking of the subject of hospitable welcome of the stranger, quickly jump to the worst-case scenario of worrying about what a stranger might do to their family, much like when the convict Jean Valjean strikes the pastor who welcomes him into his home in Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*. Indeed, when I have told others of hosting students for meals in our homes, some have expressed concern that the students, as strangers, may not be safe to invite. There are guidelines to hospitality in scripture, however, as Joshua Jipp notes,

I am not arguing that there should be no boundaries or limitations to our hospitality (see, for example, 1 Cor. 5:1-8; 6:12-20; 2 John 7-11). Engaging in hospitality with strangers obviously requires much wisdom and discernment. But intentionally placing limitations on our hospitality is a secondary matter that comes after we have adequately heard Jesus’s call and followed his example as a friend of sinners and outcasts.<sup>64</sup>

In the case of *Les Misérables*, if the risk of hospitality had never been taken, even though it resulted in an act of violence, redemption would never have taken place. Wisdom is in order for

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60. Jipp, 37.

61. Jipp, 93.

62. Jipp, 93.

63. Jipp, 93.

64. Jipp, 40.



the Christian in showing hospitality, but it is no longer wisdom which paralyzes the believer with fear and prevents the opening of the door in the first place.

## CHAPTER 3

### A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY LITERATURE

#### Introduction

It is worthwhile now to turn to a review of literature concerning the topic of Christian hospitality, and how this literature could contribute to an understanding of how hospitality could positively affect college students in a Spiritual Formation class. While we have already attempted to create a Biblical theology of hospitality, it is important to examine contemporary voices who are seeking to incorporate a Biblical theology of hospitality into our current context.

#### A Review of Contemporary Christian Hospitality Literature

A theological and scholarly assessment of the topic of Christian hospitality is found in Elizabeth Newman's *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers*. While Newman's book is light on the practical applications of Christian hospitality, she capably discovers important "distortions" of Christian hospitality, often manifested as the principles of the so-called hospitality industry of hotels and cruise ships. By looking at these "distortions," Newman connects her book to biblical principles of hospitality, which call for hospitality to be demonstrated to those in need. Hotels, in general, do not cater to the poor, and when hotels do serve the poor, it is often in the exploitative manner common to cheap motels which often serve as transitional housing for transient people. Newman writes, "...to equate hospitality with generic friendliness or private service is to domesticate it. Such domestication distorts how extraordinary and strange Christian hospitality really is."<sup>1</sup> While we may comfortably enjoy a

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1. Elizabeth Newman, *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 13.

kind smile at a restaurant which seeks to treat its guests with a hospitable welcome, the “hospitality industry” aims at an exchange of funds for the services offered. Though the hospitality industry may welcome strangers, it does not offer Christian hospitality, which meets a stranger’s basic physical and relational needs out of one’s own pocket. A project seeking to serve first year college students in hospitable welcome should be free to the students invited. While a restaurant can be a place of welcome and fellowship, meeting in a home over a meal offers a deeper relational dynamic.

Another distortion of hospitality which Newman addresses is the kind of hospitality where one seeks to impress important neighbors at parties. Newman states, “Hospitality as a topic in *Ladies’ Home Journal*, *Redbook* and *Southern Living* had (and still has) to do with beautiful homes, delicious dinners, and polite conversation. Such hospitality is really synonymous with entertainment... This hospitality is almost always extended to people who are more or less like oneself in terms of status and class.”<sup>2</sup> Newman sees this as distinct from Jesus’ message of hospitable welcome, which, if anything, was directed at the lowest classes of society, as in Luke chapter 14. The entertaining described in home improvement magazines does not meet basic physical needs because the guest of such entertaining is a person of considerable means.

Particularly noteworthy in Newman’s discussion of Christian hospitality is that Christian hospitality bears in mind the importance of truth, even when the truth hurts. Newman writes, “a faithful hospitality will not aim for niceness and frozen smiles but rather for truthful communion with God and others.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, for Newman, Christian hospitality can be truthful to the

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2. Newman, 26.

3. Newman, 24.

point of being offensive: “Christian hospitality is not determined by sophistication or lack of offense; as is well known, Jesus’s words offended his listeners time and again.”<sup>4</sup> One often imagines a hospitable welcome to evoke informal pleasantries, but Newman deftly illustrates that Jesus often most vocally challenged his audience with difficult truths around meal tables in people’s houses. Christian hospitality need not be superficially pleasant. Rather, is it possible that one’s effectiveness in sharing a hard truth is amplified when such truth-telling takes place in the context of a hospitable welcome over a meal table? In other words, a student who is eating my food in my house might be more open to a difficult truth than the same student would be had he or she not eaten at my table.

Newman challenges the American ministry context by arguing that Christian hospitality, in contradiction to many manifestations of Christian ministry “is not particularly concerned with efficiency,”<sup>5</sup> as she discusses how Jesus goes to the effort to wash each of the feet of all the disciples in John chapter 13. Efficiency, like on an assembly line, makes large numbers possible. At some point, hospitality ceases to be hospitality when large numbers of visitors are the goal. Newman challenges us with these words: “Hospitality is a practice and discipline that asks us to do what in the world’s eyes might seem inconsequential but from the perspective of the gospel is a manifestation of God’s kingdom.”<sup>6</sup> I wonder how many of us in ministry would critique the efficiency of Jesus and how he individually spent time with people.

Lonni Collins Pratt and Father Daniel Homan’s *Radical Hospitality: Benedict’s Way of Love* presents an ecumenical approach to Christian hospitality; Pratt is Methodist, Homan is

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4. Newman, 27.

5. Newman, 90.

6. Newman, 174.

Roman Catholic. *Radical Hospitality* emphasizes the perspective of the 6th century monk St. Benedict, from whose life the modern monastic movement owes its existence. Pratt and Homan, in the introduction to the topic of the Benedictine idea of hospitality, write, “Where the opportunity for hospitality exists, so does the opportunity to make a neighbor of a stranger.”<sup>7</sup> In part, this is our goal for increasing the sense of community within my Spiritual Formation classes at Toccoa Falls College, where I am hoping the students will see both me and each other as neighbors through the invitation to eat together at our house.

As Newman and other authors who write about Christian Hospitality also discuss, Pratt and Homan describe the difference between hospitality and entertaining, which is often centered on placing luxuries before esteemed guests to curry favor with them or increase the host’s reputation. Pratt and Homan write, “In Saint Benedict’s day there were no safe and cheap shelters for travelers. Along the way people could be brutalized, robbed, wounded, lost. Monasteries saved lives when they opened their doors to strangers. It was not about comfort and entertainment--it was about saving lives.”<sup>8</sup> It is hard to imagine a similar context of desperation in sharing hospitality in contemporary America, so Pratt and Homan’s words are challenging. This project aims to provide college students with a home away from home through hospitality, though it cannot replicate the same atmosphere that Saint Benedict faced.

Particularly useful in reading *Radical Hospitality* is the focus on the life of the monk and the value of the monk’s home, the monastery, as a place of Christian hospitality: “Forget about turned down sheets, mints on the pillow, and towel warmers. Monastic hospitality creates sacred space where the guest is free to be alone, to enter silence, to pray and rest. No one is compelled

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7. Lonni Collins Pratt and Fr. Daniel Homan, *Radical Hospitality: Benedict’s Way of Love* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2011), xix.

8. Pratt and Homan, 50.

to fill up the guest's spare time or set an agenda for him or her."<sup>9</sup> The home is a sacred and uncluttered space, a smaller and more personal version of the church sanctuary. Pratt and Homan's book draws a valuable distinction between the life of the average visitor to the monastery, a life busy and harried by responsibilities, with the life of the monk, dedicated to service, silence and prayer.<sup>10</sup> The daily structure of monastic hospitality focuses on spiritual retreat from a busy world. According to Homan and Pratt, "the monastic day is purposeful about keeping its holistic balance. The community has time together at prayer, during meals, and in working together and recreation. Silence is a normal part of every monastic day, usually during meals and at other times of the day, such as the silence that begins after Night Prayer and ends after breakfast or Morning Prayer."<sup>11</sup> A Benedictine approach to hospitality which emphasizes the daily structure of an extended spiritual retreat, however, is considerably different from the approach taken by this project.

Alexander Strauch's book *The Hospitality Commands: Building Loving Christian Community; Building Bridges to our Friends and Neighbors* serves as a simple and clear call for Christians to observe Biblical admonitions to practice hospitality, which has, in Strauch's assessment, been largely ignored by the contemporary church. Strauss, a church elder and lay Bible teacher argues that modern life in the Western world, with its busyness, emphasis on safety, and desire for physical comforts, has taken its toll on Christians who see hospitality as a nice but unnecessary virtue. Strauch writes,

Yale classical and New Testament scholar, Abraham J. Malherbe, points out that among the first Christians, hospitality was not merely a practical consideration but a theological one: 'The Christian practice of hospitality was not viewed simply as a means of

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9. Pratt and Homan, 17.

10. Pratt and Homan, 26.

11. Pratt and Homan, 130.

overcoming a practical problem. Theological statements by different authors in the New Testament show that it was frequently viewed as the concrete expression of Christian love.’ Indeed, the major New Testament exhortations to practice hospitality all appear within the context of brotherly love.<sup>12</sup>

For Strauch, the idea of a body of Christ not connected through fellowship shared inside the homes of other Christians is a diminished version of what it ought to be. In regard to a church which does not practice hospitality, Strauch writes, “Unless we open the doors of our homes to one another, the reality of the local church as a close-knit family of loving brothers and sisters is only a theory.”<sup>13</sup> Strauch almost seems to be pointing to the value of a house church, where there is a lingering sense of fellowship following a Bible study, as opposed to many larger congregations where the sanctuary seems to clear immediately after the service ends.<sup>14</sup> Strauch’s perspective on hospitality, grounded solidly on the context of the New Testament church offers a model for how a professor can invite his students into his home, deepening the spiritual connection between professor and students, and between students and each other.

Perhaps most useful in gaining an understanding of Christian Hospitality are the writings of Asbury Theological Seminary professor Christine Pohl in her books *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices that Sustain us* and *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. *Living into Community* is a study of four distinct practices which belong to a fully functional Christian community, one of which is hospitality, in addition to gratefulness, truthfulness and the keeping of promises.<sup>15</sup> In *Living into Community*, Pohl argues that the

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12. Alexander Strauch, *The Hospitality Commands: Building Loving Christian Community; Building Bridges to our Friends and Neighbors* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth Publishers, 2007), 16.

13. Strauch, 17.

14. Strauch, 23.

15. Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices that Sustain us* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 5.

distinct discipline of hospitality allows for people to feel a sense of belonging and being needed. She writes, “Communities in which hospitality is a vibrant practice tap into deep human longings to belong, find a place to share one’s gifts, and be valued.”<sup>16</sup> A person who is frequently invited into one’s home in Christian community begins to feel at home, for the guest is honored to be brought into what is normally a private family space.

Indeed, the showing of hospitality is not intended merely to give a sense of usefulness to the one offering hospitality to another, rather the demonstration of hospitality allows for people to feel a sense of belonging and being needed, as Pohl writes

Strangers are people without a place, disconnected from life-giving relationships and networks...In other cases, as with alienated teens or people with disabilities, persons may have a place to live, but they do not necessarily have a place where they can contribute something, or where they are valued. Because hospitality is part of what it means to be human, every human being flourishes in the context of welcome.<sup>17</sup>

Pohl highlights “strangers” as the recipients of hospitality here, in accordance with the definition of φιλοξενία.

This hospitality-based study project starts with first-semester college freshmen, who are strangers to their professor and often strangers to each other at the beginning of the semester. In the “context of welcome” in their professor’s home, relational walls between people might be dismantled. To Pohl, hospitality is not the sharing of food or lodging alone. Rather, hospitality has a relational quality which breaks down barriers between individuals and allows people to share their story to someone who will truly listen to them. Hospitality is best done by giving individuals time and attention, according to Pohl, which leads to the recipients feeling needed: “Often the best gift we can give another person is our time and attention. Human beings need a

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16. Pohl, *Living into Community*, 159.

17. Pohl, *Living into Community*, 164.



place in which they and their contributions are valued, and a hospitable community finds ways to value the gifts people bring. Few experiences are more lonely or isolating than finding oneself unwanted, unneeded, or unable to contribute.”<sup>18</sup>

Another useful aspect of *Living into Community* is Pohl’s description of her own church’s attempt at demonstrating loving Christian hospitality in the context of their Sunday morning worship service. Pohl writes, “After opening with music, prayer, and a sermon each week, the church I attend shares breakfast as part of our worship time. Community prayer follows our meal together, and we end each service with communion.”<sup>19</sup> In the context of this project, my hope is that students eating together in my home will amplify the student’s experience of our classroom material on Spiritual Formation.

Pohl’s treatment of the subject of Christian hospitality is far more extensive in her book *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. In writing *Making Room*, Pohl visits several intentional Christian communities to discuss both the benefits and challenges of offering Christian Hospitality on an ongoing basis. These organizations include L’Abri Fellowship, a Christian study community for students and seekers in ten locations around the world, the L’Arche communities, which offer opportunities for severely disabled individuals to live in community with those without disabilities, and Jubilee Partners, an intentional community which offers extended stays for war refugees. *Making Room* also discusses Pohl’s experiences at the houses of Dorothy Day’s Catholic Worker movement, as well as St. John’s and St. Benedict’s, two monasteries in rural Minnesota, among others.

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18. Pohl, *Living into Community*, 170.

19. Pohl, *Living into Community*, 175.

In visiting L'Abri Fellowship's study center in England, Pohl witnessed that, rather than seeing Christian hospitality merely as a nicety shared between Christians, Christian hospitality could pave the way for the gospel itself, specifically to non-Christians. Pohl writes

It was there (at L'Abri Fellowship in England) that I first saw how much more powerfully the gospel spoke when those who were teaching opened their homes and their lives to strangers--with no pretense, no perfection, but extraordinary faithfulness and generosity. Their hospitality made the Christian life both credible and inviting to many who stayed with them.<sup>20</sup>

I discovered a similar dynamic in a five-day visit with my wife at the L'Abri study center in Southborough, Massachusetts in early 2013. We studied independently of each other during the day, but we also performed chores for the benefit of the organization, while sharing meals with the students staying at the center at the time. In 2013, L'Abri workers in Massachusetts also hosted students for dinner in their own homes or apartments on the L'Abri campus, taking turns sharing the burden of hosting a large meal. Meals were simple, conversations were deeply spiritual, and the hosts were generous. It is easy to build a bridge from this experience at the Massachusetts L'Abri center to a project working with first year college students at Toccoa Falls College. While a Christian testimony is part of the application process to Toccoa Falls, not all students may hold orthodox Christian beliefs. When a Christian Spiritual Formation professor invites these students into his home, sharing his food with the students with no expectation of payment and no class credit given, students may find themselves more receptive to the gospel message of the class.

*Making Room* goes into extensive detail to describe both a history of hospitality in the church as well as a Biblical theology of hospitality. Pohl gives a simple definition of Christian hospitality as observed in the ancient church, when she writes, "Hospitality (in the ancient

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20. Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), xi.

church) meant extending to strangers a quality of kindness usually reserved for friends and family.”<sup>21</sup> This definition allows one to see why hospitality makes so much more sense in a home, where only family and occasionally friends are welcome to visit. Pohl, like Strauch, observes that while the church historically made Christian hospitality central to its presentation of the gospel, hospitality has seemingly vanished from the contemporary church. She writes,

Even a superficial review of the first seventeen centuries of church history reveals the importance of hospitality to the spread and credibility of the gospel, to transcending national and ethnic distinctions in the church, and to Christian care for the sick, strangers, and pilgrims. Granting that the practice was rarely as good as the rhetoric, still, we pause to wonder, if hospitality to strangers was such an important part of Christian faith and life, how did it virtually disappear?<sup>22</sup>

In the western church over the past several centuries, Pohl notes, hospitality became limited in the church to providing care for orphans and widows, often at a distance.<sup>23</sup> Today, Pohl argues, hospitality means either something akin to the hotel industry, or refers to dinner parties thrown in homes meant to impress one’s casual friends.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, as we have already mentioned, even family members seldom eat together. Why should we be surprised that churches rarely emphasize hospitality as a central part of their ministry? Such observations increase this project’s assertion that college students may have had few experiences with hospitality in their own churches, or even their own homes.

In addition to *Making Room*’s historical survey of Christian hospitality, Pohl’s book also challenges the reader to understand Christian hospitality both biblically and theologically. Pohl emphasizes Jesus’ role as both guest and host in the story of Christian hospitality, especially as

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21. Pohl, *Making Room*, 19.

22. Pohl, *Making Room*, 7.

23. Pohl, *Making Room*, 36.

24. Pohl, *Making Room*, 36.

seen in Jesus' story of the sheep and the goats at the final judgment in Matthew 25:31-46. Pohl writes,

This intermingling of guest and host roles in the person of Jesus is part of what makes the story of hospitality so compelling for Christians. Jesus welcomes and needs welcome; Jesus requires that followers depend on and provide hospitality. The practice of Christian hospitality is always located within the larger picture of Jesus' sacrificial welcome to all who come to him.<sup>25</sup>

Pohl stresses the importance of showing hospitality to those in great need. She states, "The distinctive quality of Christian hospitality is that it offers a generous welcome to the "least," without concern for advantage or benefit to the host."<sup>26</sup>

However, in *Making Room*, Pohl does not merely tell the story of hospitality or state the Biblical commands regarding it. Pohl demonstrates the great benefit of Christian hospitality she sees on the ground visiting various intentional communities, making ties between a theology of Christian hospitality and its practical outworking. She writes, "The theological importance of eating together helps explain why practitioners of hospitality so often report that they feel closest to God in times of shared meals."<sup>27</sup> I was able to observe this phenomenon myself in the context of shared meals in our campus ministry at Appalachian State, which is also why I desire to share a similar experience with the students in my classes at Toccoa Falls College. Furthermore, because the guest has been welcomed and fed, they become more fertile soil for the seed of the gospel, as Pohl writes,

In the context of hospitality, strangers with questions about faith and meaning can find answers. Monasteries which are never without guests welcome seekers and inquirers looking for a fuller Christian life. For forty years, L'Abri households have welcomed

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25. Pohl, *Making Room*, 17.

26. Pohl, *Making Room*, 16.

27. Pohl, *Making Room*, 30.

students and seekers from around the world. In both settings, hospitable welcome embodies the answers; it gives flesh to the content of the gospel.<sup>28</sup>

The effectiveness of Christian hospitality in paving the way for the gospel is particularly evident, according to Pohl, when the guest has never experienced a functional Christian home. She writes,

“In contemporary society, a significant portion of the population is growing up in settings where they do not see models of strong families or healthy marriages. Families shaped by deep Christian faith and strong love for one another can offer an extraordinary gift in welcoming others into their homes...Edith Schaeffer, cofounder of L’Abri, observed, ‘For some young people, L’Abri homes are the first really happy homes they have ever seen...You can’t imagine what the opportunity of eating, doing dishes, helping peel potatoes, being a part of conversation and family prayers in such a variety of homes does, which any amount of lecturing and ‘talking about home life’ could never do.’”<sup>29</sup>

It is one thing to hear about “family values” or to read Biblical admonitions regarding family life, but it’s quite another thing to be welcomed into a real, flesh and blood Christian family, particularly when one has never experienced such a loving family. A college student from a broken family gets to experience a family and marriage that is whole, an experience my wife and I desire to share with the students whose lives we touch.

Pohl’s other significant contribution to a discussion of Christian hospitality concerns her description of the need of hospitable hosts to themselves be nurtured by a robust spiritual life. On the subject of hosts and their pursuit of spiritual disciplines, Pohl writes,

We nourish our lives with personal prayer and community worship. We are fed through reading and studying Scripture, and we are renewed through serious observance of sabbaths. Meals, worship, and the Eucharist combine together to nourish those who offer hospitality. A life of hospitality is much less about dramatic gestures than it is about steady work--faithful labor that is undergirded by prayer and sustained by grace. When hosts are nourished in the midst of providing hospitality, they find an internal peace essential for making others feel comfortable, safe and welcome in their presence.<sup>30</sup>

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28. Pohl, *Making Room*, 103.

29. Pohl, *Making Room*, 155.

30. Pohl, *Making Room*, 183.

The frequent showing of hospitality can be draining to the individual offering a hospitable welcome, which is why staff workers at L'Abri Fellowship rotate between themselves the serving of evening meals. A spiritually refreshed and well-rested host means that a greater welcome can be offered. A burned-out host does not genuinely welcome others, even if the door is open and there is food on the table. L'Abri takes care to protect their hosts from taking on an undue amount of work, which would drain the hosts of the energy needed to continue to provide a hospitable welcome to strangers.

Mandy Smith, the lead pastor of University Christian Church in Cincinnati, in her book *The Vulnerable Pastor*, discusses how the urge to impress undermines hospitality, and burns out the energy of the host. She writes,

Whenever we used to invite guests for dinner, I spent the entire day working myself into a frenzy so that by the time the guests arrived, every garnish was in place, every surface shone-and I just wanted to go to bed...after many years I've learned to keep the planning simple, and on my best days I pray for the guests while I'm chopping vegetables or take a nap to be sure I'm genuine in my welcome by the time the doorbell rings. The focus is not on the food or house but on the time together.<sup>31</sup>

One wonders if a Television show ready house is decidedly less welcoming than one which is tidy but human. Surely, the house my wife and I were welcomed into in Oregon in my seminary years was far less than perfect, yet, the lack of perfection was, for me, a significant part of the gravity of the moment. While it is true that a filthy house could indeed lack welcome, a perfect house may accomplish much the same, as the guest may feel out of place when comparing the house to their own. It is important when offering hospitality to make our guests comfortable. A house that is either too dirty or too perfect may not succeed in doing so.

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31. Mandy Smith, *The Vulnerable Pastor* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 178.

Kristin Schell's book on hospitality, *The Turquoise Table: Finding Community and Connection in Your Own Front Yard*, shares Schell's lay insights on what it means to be hospitable in the context of her own suburban town. Schell discovered a simple, practical idea for fostering community in her suburban Texas neighborhood. She bought a standard, run-of-the-mill hardware store picnic table, painted it her favorite color (turquoise), and attempted to spend a significant portion of her daily life sitting at the table. To pass the time at her picnic table, Schell would undertake simple tasks like helping her children with homework. Her consistent, visible presence led to conversations with neighbors and relationships at depths she had never before experienced. Inspired by meals eaten on a high school exchange student trip to France, Schell discovered the obvious but seldom-acknowledged truth that the typical suburban dining room in America was the least-used room in the house, often staged exquisitely for a meal which rarely occurs.

Schell's book was not written for academics, nor for theology students. Rather, *The Turquoise Table* is written for mothers like herself who seek a simple way to better know her neighbors and community; the book is filled with practical suggestions and recipes for a low-key hospitality. It is fitting that I found her book in a boutique home furnishings store in a small north Georgia tourist town. Schell's experiences confirm what many of the more academic books on hospitality suggest, that technology is a culprit in the decline of community in American life. She writes, "I've never seen a place setting—formal or casual—that includes a place for iPhones. I'm not huge on ultimatums, but this is a hill I will die on: technology is the only unwelcome guest at the table."<sup>32</sup> I concur with Schell's observations. I have found that students who come to

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32. Kristin Schell, *The Turquoise Table: Finding Community and Connection in Your Own Front Yard* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2017), 25.

our house will often immediately ask for the internet password, perhaps to mitigate their feelings of awkwardness at making new friends.

Specifically, Schell's book seems to correct an earlier consequence of another technological innovation, namely, that of the advent of air conditioning. Air conditioners sent many Americans indoors to more comfortable temperatures, while Schell's suggestion of the turquoise table sends her and others right back into the front yard where conversation with neighbors actually occurs. Much of what happens at Schell's front yard table is seemingly inconsequential. She writes,

Our society equates busyness with success, and I internalize that to mean the more I do, the bigger the difference I will make. Slowing down to a halt long enough and often enough to notice that a stranger who jogs by is suddenly missing feels at first like maybe a colossal waste of time. However, it was in those seemingly insignificant moments of sitting at the table, observing and noticing—sometimes in deafening silence—I was learning about my neighborhood.<sup>33</sup>

Hospitality is slow, without an immediate earthly sparkle, but it is holy, as when Schell writes,

Hospitality always feels small when you hold it in your hands. It's not until you let it go, released like an offering, that you see how extravagant and hallowed it is. Sometimes I don't 'feel' anything happening, which, in our instant gratification and quick-fix society, feels like failure. Building community, investing in the lives right in front of us, requires us to take the long view.<sup>34</sup>

While theoretical texts about American community might be helpful in developing a theology of hospitality, Schell presents her readers with eminently doable ideas, such as simple recipes, or her "iBasket," where smartphones are placed prior to a meal, or other technology-free periods of time in a family's daily schedule. Schell suggests having several phone chargers ready, so that it is not tempting to place the phone in a location where it will be impulsively used later. One does not need to look far to observe the need for such an idea, particularly at restaurants, where it is

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33. Schell, 95.

34. Schell, 97.



not at all uncommon to see a conversation-free table populated by three or four friends or family members, each immersed in the virtual world of their own phone or tablet.

In Rosaria Butterfield's book *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World*, the former University of Syracuse professor sheds light on the power that simple hospitality has to change lives, including her own. A former opponent of Evangelical Christian faith and practice, Butterfield's life was changed when she responded to a simple invitation from a reader of a newspaper article she wrote. The invitation was to dinner at the home of an elderly pastor and his wife, who modeled the relational warmth of a Christian home for Butterfield. Over time, Butterfield was drawn not just to her pastor's home, but to his church and to Christian faith. Now the wife of a Reformed Presbyterian Church pastor, Butterfield allows her reader to see how she and her husband employ the Christian act of hospitality to their neighbors in their suburban home outside Durham, North Carolina.

To Butterfield, hospitality is an act of grace extended to the neighborhood kids and their parents, their pets, as well as to the methamphetamine dealer who lives across the street. The Butterfield home is regularly open to their entire neighborhood to eat, worship and play. Contrary to the typical use of the word hospitality in American Evangelical churches, where it often refers to meals served in church facilities, Butterfield defines "radically ordinary hospitality" as "using your Christian home in a daily way that seeks to make strangers neighbors, and neighbors the family of God. It brings glory to God, serves others, and lives out the gospel in word and deed."<sup>35</sup> Key to Butterfield's definition of hospitality is that it takes place in a Christian's "living space."<sup>36</sup> In my own project, some at Toccoa Falls College suggested that I

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35. Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2018), 31.

36. Butterfield, 31.

may be able to host students in an on-campus space, offering furniture and an atmosphere that was more like a home and less like a typical college classroom. But Butterfield's insistence that hospitality take place in the home of the host is not peripheral to a Biblical expression of hospitality; it is central. It was essential to me that I find a way to host my students at my house, rather than meeting in an on-campus facility and providing food and drink.

Further describing her vision of hospitality, she writes, "radically ordinary hospitality values the time it takes to invest in relationships, to build bridges, to repent of sins of the past, to reconcile. Bridge building and remaking friendships cannot be rushed."<sup>37</sup> For the purposes of my thesis-project, I made sure that the meal offered at my house lasted at least ninety minutes, in addition to the time it took to pick up students from campus and take them home. The context of hospitality contributes to the authenticity of the friendships. Butterfield's vision of hospitality is no simple one to put into effect, as she clarifies, "God calls us to practice hospitality as a daily way of life, not as an occasional activity when time and finance allow. Radically ordinary hospitality means this: God promises to put the lonely in families (Ps. 68:6), and he intends to use your house as living proof."<sup>38</sup> To invite one's neighbors into our home regularly deepens trust in relationships, and brings about a depth of conversation that is more difficult to find outside a place that feels like home. Butterfield writes,

Christian hospitality cares for the things that our neighbors care about. Esteeming others more highly than ourselves means nothing less. It means starting where you are and looking around for who needs you. It means communicating Christian love in word and deed. It means making yourself trustworthy enough to bear burdens of real life and real problems.<sup>39</sup>

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37. Butterfield, 35.

38. Butterfield, 37.

39. Butterfield, 166.

These actions of hospitality are inherently evangelistic, as Butterfield notes, “such drawing in does not replace the church—it brings the church to the people. It meets people with gospel grace where they are. It leaves them yearning for more.”<sup>40</sup> The Butterfield family has crafted a lifestyle making hospitality possible. Through homeschooling, walking dogs, making play spaces available both to their adopted children and the children of the neighborhood, and by always having affordable meals ready to go, the Butterfield home operates as a constant center of mission in their neighborhood, a compelling vision of practical hospitality that stands as a challenge to the American church.

Lastly, it is important in any literature review of Christian hospitality to consider Francis and Edith Schaeffer’s L’Abri ministry, begun in Switzerland in the 1950’s, which is described in Edith Schaeffer’s 1992 book, *L’Abri*, as well as in Christine Pohl’s *Making Room*. The Schaeffer’s, unsure as to why God had called them from a successful church in the United States to a chalet in the Swiss Alps, soon found themselves taking in guests from all walks of life and all theological persuasions. Some heard of L’Abri and came to see what it was like of their own volition, while others were students who had met the Schaeffer’s daughters at university who came home with them for a visit.

In Edith Schaeffer’s account of the L’Abri ministry, it is worth noting that L’Abri staff workers never advertised or recruited, they simply prayed for both workers and guests to come, stay and eat, and to hear the message of the Christian gospel. These principles are still at work in modern L’Abri study centers today. Schaeffer says this, “a common factor in every case, however, for those of us who comprise the workers of L’Abri, is this: we believe that God brings the people in answer to prayer.”<sup>41</sup> Edith Schaeffer was deeply involved not just in teaching or

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40. Butterfield, 197.

instruction, but in washing and folding laundry, cleaning bathrooms and bedrooms, washing dishes, and hosting visitors for meals or for tea. In one of many stories of hospitality Edith Schaeffer tells in the book, she describes her resentment at the length of her husband's Bible study on Romans taught to several visiting students, while she baked orange rolls and cinnamon buns, made coffee and washed dishes. She writes, "my inner resentment that had been building up because of having to zoom around doing extra housework, while these girls sat around 'resting' just melted at that moment...It came from this sudden thought, 'I'm sure God sent these girls here, whether they knew it or not.'"<sup>42</sup> It is striking in reading Edith Schaeffer's writing because she goes back and forth constantly between theology and baking, demonstrating a key understanding of the nature of Christian hospitality itself. Hospitality does not become less theological by being intensely practical.

### **Transition**

In the first chapter of this thesis-project, I have laid out the problem of a lack of relational connection between individuals in contemporary American society. I have also established my research question of whether the largely lost biblical practice of hospitality is an effective means of communicating spiritual truth at a deeper level to young people in America, who were raised in an age of relational isolation. My hypothesis is that the biblical practice of hospitality is indeed an effective way to amplify the communication of spiritual truth at a deeper level to present-day college students.

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41. Edith Schaeffer, *L'Abri* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1992), 14.

42. Schaeffer, 54.

In my second chapter, I established a working definition of Biblical hospitality, namely, that Biblical hospitality is the demonstration of love for God by specific acts of love for neighbor through the meeting of basic physical and relational needs. We as Christians, through showing hospitality, share God's offer of relationship to us with others through meeting our neighbor's needs for food, shelter and relational welcome.

In my third chapter, I explored the relevant contemporary literature of Christian hospitality, looking at both theoretical concepts and practical ideas for sharing a hospitable welcome with others. Hospitality is theologically and biblically driven, and yet it is also practically displayed in L'Abri study centers and in neighborhood picnic tables.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PROJECT DESIGN

#### **Introduction**

After reviewing perspectives on Christian hospitality in contemporary Christian literature (chapter 3), it is now important to synthesize the suggestions found in this literature with the scripture-based theology of hospitality expressed in chapter 2, and to combine these insights with my own ministry experiences in Christian hospitality, as described in chapter 1. In so doing, my aim is to create a project in which my hypothesis is tested in the context of the Christian college classroom.

The primary research question of this thesis-project is this: Is the largely lost biblical practice of hospitality an effective means of communicating spiritual truth at a deeper level to American undergraduate students who were raised in an age of unprecedented relational isolation? My hypothesis is that, yes, the biblical practice of hospitality can be an effective, counter-cultural means of communicating spiritual truth more deeply to college students who were raised in a technologically-connected, yet relationally-deprived age.

I will apply this research question to my teaching as an adjunct professor in both Bible and Ministry at Toccoa Falls College. Toccoa Falls College is an Evangelical Christian college affiliated with the Christian & Missionary Alliance, a denomination in the Wesleyan tradition. Toccoa Falls College is, in addition, a governing member of the Council on Christian Colleges and Universities, a global Evangelical higher education association.

The fourth chapter of this doctoral thesis-project will address the design of the project in five parts. Part 1 describes the two Foundations of Spiritual Formation classes I taught to

students in the fall of 2018, along with two initial plans developed to integrate hospitality into those two classes. This integration was designed to evaluate the thesis-project hypothesis that hospitality is an effective counter-cultural means of communicating spiritual truths to today's college students.

Unfortunately, Part 2 of chapter four explains how neither of these two integration options were accepted by the college, forcing a last-minute change of project design. Nevertheless, the third project design turned out to be quite effective. Part 3 of chapter four then describes the four different research instruments utilized in the project, while Part 4 outlines the logistics of this new design of implementing hospitality into the two Spiritual Formation classes. Finally, Part 5 of chapter four, articulates the format for the focus group interview at the end of the semester, along with what questions were asked in that interview.

### **Part 1: Two Spiritual Formation Classes**

In the fall of 2018, I taught two semester-long Foundations of Spiritual Formation classes, a required course for all students at Toccoa Falls College. Most students take this course in the first semester of their freshman year. This Spiritual Formation course covers topics dealing with the student's spiritual identity and the development of their relationship with God, including class sessions studying the Holy Spirit, spiritual disciplines, and salvation, among other topics. The class size is kept intentionally small so that discussion can be facilitated more easily than in a larger lecture-based class. The two courses I taught contained identical lessons and assignments, with the same reading and textbooks, on an identical schedule from week to week throughout the semester.

My initial plan for implementing Biblical hospitality into the course was to alter the setting of the two different class sections rather than the content. One class, which took place on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:30-9:45 AM, would be taught in a typical classroom in the Ministry and Leadership Center building, while the second class, which took place on Tuesday nights from 6-8:50 PM, would be taught in our living room at home. Enrollment in these classes is usually limited to twenty students, so our home could certainly contain such a group, and my wife and I planned to offer the students homemade dessert and coffee at the very least, as a show of hospitality to the students. Since the material was identical but the setting was different, the research instruments were designed to compare how the Spiritual Formation class was received by those meeting over food in my home, and those meeting in a typical classroom, (the latter acting as a control group). The challenges to this plan included the logistics of transportation, since my house is 16 miles from the college, along with insurance regulations required by the college, particularly since the students in the Tuesday night class would be required to attend class in my home. I discussed this plan at length with the faculty chair of the Ministry and Leadership Department, and also mentioned it briefly to a member of the school President's cabinet. The initial reception from the college was positive.

The second planned option for implementing hospitality into my teaching, in case the first one was rejected, involved both Spiritual Formation classes meeting on campus as usual. In addition to the normal curriculum, all students would be required to listen to a series of lessons entitled "Relational Closeness in an Isolated Age" in one of two formats. In one format, students would be able to attend a home-based weekend retreat at a family home in Rabun County next to Lake Burton. Only about 7-8 students could attend such a retreat due to space limitations; so at least two weekends would be offered during the course of the semester. My wife and I would



stay on-site in the same home during the weekend, making and serving the meals and interacting with students. In the second format, available for students who would be unable or unwilling to attend one of the retreat weekends, students could listen to the same material as recorded audio programs, and would be required to write a small report on the lectures in place of attending the retreat.

The students who opted for the second format would serve as a control group. Some students would be exposed to hospitality while the control group would not, though the content of classroom material remained the same. Whether a student listened to the material in the first or second format, this assignment would be worth 15% of their grade. In the first format, students would be graded based on their attendance at the retreat. If this was impossible, according to the second format, students would be graded based on writing of a short paper responding to the material in the recorded lectures.

In both options, an anonymous research questionnaire would also be filled out by all students. In the first option of the home-based class, the questionnaire and a spiritual inventory would be completed by all students at the beginning of the semester, and the same spiritual inventory would be completed again by all students at the end of the semester. Then all spiritual inventory questions would be compared between the two groups, both those who experienced the hospitality of a home-based class, and those who met in a conventional classroom format as a control group.

In the second option, the retreat-based class, the same anonymous research questionnaire would be required at the beginning, and all students would take the spiritual inventory at the beginning and end of the semester as well. Furthermore, all students in the second option would be asked to answer questions designed to explore their perceptions about the “Relational

Closeness in an Isolated Age” material. Student perspectives on that material as well as their answers on the spiritual inventory would be evaluated to discover the differences between those who did and did not attend the retreat. At the conclusion of the semester, I would conduct a focus group interview with those who attended the retreat for extra class credit, asking questions about how the hospitality shown on the retreat enhanced the students’ experiences of the class itself.

Ultimately, whether I used the first option of a home-based class or the second, and to me less preferable, option of the weekend retreats, would be determined by the Institutional Review Board of Toccoa Falls College and any other necessary parties. I am grateful for the help of Dr. Philip Howard, chair of the Ministry and Leadership program at Toccoa Falls College for helping me to navigate institutional guidelines and assisting in drafting the survey instruments used in the study. These survey instruments, once drafted, required approval by the Institutional Review Boards at both Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and Toccoa Falls College.

## **Part 2: A Change of Plans**

On July 31, 2018, I received word from the Director of Institutional Research at the college that the study as presented, along with the research instruments, was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Toccoa Falls College. This meant that I would be teaching two sections of Foundations of Spiritual Formation, one on campus (the Tuesday/Thursday class meeting from 8:30 AM to 9:45 AM, and taught in a conventional classroom) and one in my home off campus (Tuesday nights, from 6:00 PM to 8:50 PM). Additionally, the research instruments, including the beginning of the semester questionnaire, the end of the semester questionnaire, the spiritual inventory (which would be given at both the beginning and end of the

semester), and the focus group interview questions were all approved. The only questions remaining in my mind at this point were about transportation and insurance.

On Tuesday, August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018, however, I spoke with a high-level college administrator who I had assumed was a part of the Institutional Review Board which approved the project proposal. At that time, I was working on the logistics of transportation and awaiting any forms or list of restrictions I might need to consider as I implemented the plan. So, it came as a complete surprise when I learned in this conversation that I had not yet received approval for the home-based class on Tuesday nights. My entire project was now at risk. The college was having difficulties figuring out a way for me to host a class in my home, due to travel and insurance regulations.

While the administrator offered to plead my case to the necessary authorities within the college, I found out a few days later that the answer was no; the home-based class was simply impossible. I was still committed to teaching both the Tuesday/Thursday morning class and the Tuesday night class. However, I was required to teach both classes on campus as usual. The college's first day of classes was Monday, August 27<sup>th</sup> which meant I would teach both classes for the first time on Tuesday, August 28<sup>th</sup>. This left me only one week to work out an alternative plan, and there was now too little time to implement the second option of the retreat-based class. Because I had believed that my initial plan of the home-based class was approved several weeks earlier, I had already submitted a syllabus for both classes making no mention of a retreat, nor had I made any headway on setting dates for the fall which would allow me to host a retreat. I was at an impasse and unsure of what to do.

The following day, August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019, I taught both class sessions for the first time, making no mention of how I was going to implement hospitality as a practice in either class.

Over the course of the next week, I considered completely changing the topic of my thesis-project. Ultimately, I decided to proceed with the hospitality project, but needed to think of a third option for how to do so.

My wife and I developed a plan for how to continue with the topic of Biblical hospitality and its effect on students in a Spiritual Formation class. During the course of the semester, I would offer a meal for students at our house one night a week, as much as possible considering the demands of both the academic calendar and our family schedule. This dinner at my house would be offered to all students in both my Foundations of Spiritual Formation classes. I later chose to allow students from my Introduction to the New Testament class to attend as well, though these students would not receive any of the surveys at the beginning or end of the semester. Students who attended these meals were neither required to attend, nor were they rewarded with extra credit for attending. I knew there was a potential that our numbers would be so small that the research might seem inadequate, but it was the best option available at such a late hour. All of the previously prepared and approved survey instruments would be used to compare the effect of Christian hospitality on three groups of students; those who came to a few dinners, those who came to more dinners, and those who did not come to dinners at all.

This plan had its benefits. It was optional and not required, unlike either of my first two options. This would alleviate liability concerns for the college, in addition to allowing students to partake of Christian hospitality simply because they wanted to do so. Second, this plan allowed for uncontrolled time in Christian hospitality. Conversations would be natural, determined by the personalities and interests of those present, rather than artificially determined by the need to get through course material. I would have no agenda in terms of starting or maintaining conversation with students. Third, this plan allowed my children to be involved, as they would have been a

deterrent to students learning the material in the previous two options. In the home-based class option, they would have remained in their rooms during our classroom time. In the retreat option, we would have had our children stay with grandparents for the weekend, due to limitations of space. In this new plan, students would have the potential to see a real family in action, with arguments between my kids, and my kids playing their inevitable games of show and tell, bringing down art projects and toys for the students to see. In fact, the involvement of our children would end up being no small part of the project.

### **Part 3: Research Instruments**

The research instruments used in this study include a beginning of the semester questionnaire, an end of the semester questionnaire, a spiritual inventory (taken by students at both the beginning and end of the semester), and a series of focus group interview questions (which will be more fully described in part 5 of chapter four). With the exception of the focus group interview, it was essential to make sure that these research instruments were voluntary and completely anonymous. Class time would be used to answer the questions, after students signed an Informed Consent Document.<sup>1</sup>

The first research instrument, the beginning of the semester questionnaire,<sup>2</sup> was to be filled out at the beginning of the semester in class, after two weeks of class had finished. This questionnaire consisted of 22 questions grouped into five categories, entitled “you,” “close friendships,” “family of origin,” “church” and “perspectives on technology.” The intention of this survey was to better understand students, their personalities, their use of time, and their

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1. See Appendix B, “Informed Consent Document.”

2. See Appendix A, part I, “Beginning of Semester Questionnaire.”

exposure to Christian hospitality. The three “you” questions dealt with the personality of the students, along with how they preferred to spend their free time and how they actually spent their free time. The three “close friendships” questions addressed whether students had close friendships, how they usually interacted with these friends, and how they preferred to interact with these friends. In the three “family of origin” questions, students were asked who raised them, how frequently they ate dinner in the evenings with their family, and how frequently their families attended church.

In addition, students were asked seven questions about their church, including the size and location of the church, the worship style of their home congregation, and three questions about student experiences with hospitality, and whether such hospitality was shown by a pastoral staff member or fellow church members. The final section of the questionnaire, entitled “perspectives on technology,” consisted of six questions about how student use of technology affected their relationships. These six questions considered how much time students spent daily in front of a screen (not including doing homework or watching television), how technology affected the meals they ate with friends or family, how smartphone technology affected their experience of church, and how their phone affected their sleep. Furthermore, one question was asked about whether students had made any friends exclusively online, and how the quality of those friendships compared to their conventional, face-to-face relationships.

The second research instrument, the end of the semester questionnaire,<sup>3</sup> asked four questions of all students in both sections of the two Foundations of Spiritual Formation classes, and was administered during the final exam period, directly after the students turned in their final exam. The first question simply asked how many times the student attended the weekly dinners

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3. See Appendix A, part II, “Questionnaire for both the Beginning and End of the Semester.”

at the professor's home, a question which allowed me as the researcher to divide all the research instruments into groups based on their level of exposure to our hospitality. Questions two and three asked how well the student knew the professor at the end of the semester, and how well the professor knew the student. The fourth and final question asked the students for their opinion on the most beneficial aspect of the class.

The third research instrument was a Spiritual Inventory, to be given at both the beginning and end of the semester.<sup>4</sup> The questions asked at the beginning of the semester were identical to those asked at the end of the semester, in order to measure perceived differences in students' spiritual lives during the semester. The Spiritual Inventory consisted of nine different statements, which the students were to evaluate according to the Likert scale, the answers ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". There were three categories of statements describing the individual student's spiritual life, including statements about the student's relationship with God, the student's relationship with peers in the class, and the student's relationship to the professor. These statements are based simply on Jesus's description of the greatest commandment in Matthew 22 and Mark 12, in addition to Deuteronomy 6. The goal of asking these questions falls in line with the thesis-project hypothesis, namely, that the lost biblical practice of hospitality is an effective means of amplifying the communication of spiritual truth to present-day college students, who were raised in a technologically-wired but relationally-deprived age. These Spiritual Inventory statements were approved by the Institutional Review Board at both Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and Toccoa Falls College, as were the other research instruments. By comparing student answers at the beginning of the semester with their answers at the end of the semester, and dividing the students into groups based on how frequently they attended meals

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4. See Appendix A, part II.

at the professor's house, the goal was to demonstrate how much a show of hospitality affected their answers to these questions. A challenge inherent to the use of these research tools was how to keep the surveys anonymous while being able to match student answers from the beginning of the semester with the same student answers at the end of the semester, which I will describe more fully in chapter five.

The final research instrument was the focus group interview,<sup>5</sup> which was to be conducted by me as the professor with a group of key students who had experienced the hospitality-based meals far more than the majority of students in both classes. This final research instrument shall be described more fully in part 5 of this chapter.

#### **Part 4: Logistics of a new Project Design**

As opposed to my original plans, this new thesis-project plan required solving new logistical challenges. In particular, I had to consider how best to invite students to meals at our house, how to provide transportation for everyone who desired to come, and what the student meals at our house would be like.

I decided to invite everyone from all three of my classes, including 21 students in the Tuesday/Thursday Foundations of Spiritual Formation class, 16 students in the Tuesday night Spiritual Formation class, and 41 students in the Introduction to the New Testament class; 88 students in all. I invited students by an announcement in class, as well as via email, where I mentioned not only the transportation procedure, but also the menu for that evening's dinner.

I recruited a former student of mine as a volunteer to help me drive students to and from campus on either Sunday nights, when we held most of our weekly meals, or Monday nights,

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5. See Appendix A, part IV for focus group interview questions. See Appendix C for a transcript of the focus group interview.



which covered the weeks when Sundays simply could not work. Between the two cars, we offered rides for ten students. My hope was that eventually students from the three classes might offer to drive as well. The ride to and from campus was about 25 minutes, so I allowed for sixty total minutes of transportation. Our designated pickup time was 6:30 PM, so we could eat at 7 PM.

The weekly dinners themselves presented some logistical challenges. I wanted to allow for enough time at our house for genuine conversation and welcome, while at the same time making sure to honor the study and work schedules of students. I allowed 90 minutes at my house for eating and fellowship, promising to leave with students at 8:30 PM, so that students would be back on campus by 9:00 PM. Students were given our address in case they wanted to drive separately, a plan which also made it possible for students to attend meals even if they were driving back to the college from out of town or simply lived off campus.

The weekly meals allowed for natural one-on-one conversations to occur during the preparation, eating, and clean up. The informality of the meals enabled guests to speak their thoughts in an environment that I felt was far more comfortable than a church worship service or Sunday school class. We felt choosing the right food for the meal was not a meaningless detail, but that the food we served would send a message. Intent is important in showing hospitality. If the aim is to impress, food can distance people from one another, “entertaining” rather than demonstrating Christian hospitality. My wife and I felt that the food should be simple, allowing for dietary needs of guests and hosts alike. Ideally, the food would be homemade, which also sent a message. My wife and I believe that, for instance, serving a delivery pizza as opposed to a homemade meal would change the quality of the hospitality far more than an outside observer might expect. The effort put into making something yourself changes the nature of the gift of the

offering of food. Another aspect of the meal service that was important to us was serving students alongside our own children. Serving children alongside guests accentuates the family atmosphere so unique to hospitality ministry.

We would set up several places for students to sit and eat, both inside, at our small kitchen table and larger dining room table, and outside, where on warm days students could sit on the back porch with one another, eating and conversing. We are blessed to have a covered back porch of decent size.

A question which may arise in the mind of one seeking to share hospitable welcome in their home is whether or not to include a time of Bible study or teaching. It is important that guests feel that they are truly welcome in a home, rather than manipulated into attending a Bible study with the meal offered as a lure. While a demonstration of Christian hospitality allows for laid-back conversation, it is good to set aside specific times of teaching. Jesus repeatedly taught his audiences during a hosted meal. However, it is worth remembering that there are a multitude of opportunities for students to hear a sermon, but not so many opportunities which allow for interaction among all participants where divergent viewpoints and probing questions are welcome. Such freedom to ask questions is a rarity in Sunday morning services, yet it can also be rare in college Bible classes, simply due to the nature of a large lecture class covering a broad topic. In the context of this project, I did not want to create a different outcome between the students who attended and meals and those who did not, so I chose to keep the weekly dinners limited to meals alone.

Though no Bible teaching would be included in our weekly dinners, a home setting offers a unique chance for conversation, guided by the host who has shown love to his/her audience by feeding them. Furthermore, a smaller group in a home makes allowance for multiple expressions

of emotion. Laughter, even during a serious spiritual talk or conversation, can be helpful for making people feel comfortable, as I often found in my experiences in campus ministry. However, a multitude of laughter without any conversational depth can become shallow. In a serious spiritual talk or conversation, heartfelt expressions of grief are also good. And yet, a multitude of tears could be overly dramatic to some and draining to others if it became a constant feature in conversation over a meal. A home setting allows for many expressions of emotion to be held in balance depending on the leading of the Spirit and the needs of those who have been welcomed into the Christian home.

For these reasons, we decided to feature no driven conversation at our meals and no designated icebreakers. Furthermore, it was important to allow for natural conversation in part so that the survey instruments would be done with as much integrity as possible. I wanted the hospitality to be the influencing factor in student surveys, not the special spiritual content of a Bible message given during a meal. Our weekly dinners were to be a meal and conversation; spiritual content, though it may arise naturally in conversation, was to be exclusively set aside for class sessions.

This natural Christian hospitality, we believed, would allow our guests to see us as we are, rather than, perhaps, as cast members in an idealized television show. We then would be able to emphasize the real over the ideal and to invite others to experience the grace we ourselves so desperately need. To invite guests into our family life allows them to see a real Christian family, an encouraging prospect in a world full of broken families.

## **Part 5: Focus Group Interview**

The final phase of the project involved a semi-structured focus group interview of students who had frequently attended meals at our house. Initially, prior to the change in plans resulting in a new project design, this focus group interview was to be held with students I personally invited to participate. I was to choose these students either from those in the Tuesday night hospitality-based class, or from those who had attended the hospitality-based retreat. Ultimately, the focus group interview would be held with a number of students who had been to our dinners several times, including students from both Spiritual Formation classes as well as students from my New Testament course.

It was important to me as the researcher to hold this interview after students had finished their final exams, so the interview was planned for the night of the final exam for the Tuesday night Foundations of Spiritual Formation class, once student exams were finished. The students who participated would be the students who had mostly actively attended the weekly dinners at the professor's home during the course of the semester, including students from both Spiritual Formation classes as well as students from my New Testament course. Certain questions were, however, only applicable to the students in the Spiritual Formation courses.

The questions would be designed to better understand student thoughts and experiences with hospitality. Some questions were asked in order to hear students describe their experiences of relational closeness with those in their church congregations. In addition, other church-related questions sought to understand what students do and do not like about churches, especially related to the use of digital technology in congregational worship. Another set of questions would be asked about the students' experiences of hospitality during the semester at the professor's home. The students present for the focus group interview would be asked how the

invitation was received, and what other students outside of their classes thought about the fact that they were invited to eat at the professor's house on a weekly basis throughout the semester. Finally, the focus group would be asked how hospitality could be incorporated into the life of a large church, as well as on a Christian college campus, both in the classrooms and residence halls.

### **Conclusion**

My goal in inviting all of the students enrolled in my fall semester 2018 classes into my home almost weekly during the course of the semester was to see how beneficial the biblical practice of hospitality was in amplifying the articulation of spiritual truth to college students. Unfortunately, as we have established above, college students today live in an age of unprecedented digital access filled with relational isolation. In evaluating both the beginning of the semester survey as well as the end of the semester survey, my hope was that I could get an idea of how much students grew spiritually in relationship to God and others during the course of the semester. Furthermore, I would be able to see the difference between the results in the lives of those who benefited from the professor's hospitable home and those in the control group, namely, those students who never attended weekly dinners. My theory is that hospitality, since it is both a Biblical and increasingly counter-cultural practice, can significantly impact the positive spiritual growth of both people within the church and outside the church. If we can observe this in the lives of Christian college students, we might be able to discover some ways to implement the practice of Christian hospitality in the lives of students in churches as well as on college campuses.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### OUTCOMES

#### **Introduction**

At the conclusion of this study, the results of the project were expected to demonstrate that, in light of the relatively small amount of student exposure to hospitality, especially in an era when families seldom eat together, Christian hospitality would be proved to be an effective way of communicating spiritual truth to college students. Because hospitality is a biblical practice, and due to the increasing sense of personal alienation between individuals in 21st century America, the church has an opportunity to provide a relatively rare act of humanity and personal warmth to a world that is becoming ever more impersonal. In addition, in the specific context of the relationship between a Christian college and its students, or a Christian college professor and his students, the results of this thesis-project were expected to demonstrate that the material covered in an introductory Spiritual Formation course would be more personally and more sufficiently received because of the practice of hospitality shown to the students by the professor. Perhaps, in addition, readers who work within the context of the Christian college would be challenged to find ways to incorporate hospitality into their classroom experience as a result.

In the fall of 2018, I taught two Foundations of Spiritual Formation courses at Toccoa Falls College, as described in chapter four. The vast majority of students were first semester freshmen, newly graduated from high school. All students in both classes filled out a beginning of semester questionnaire and an end of semester questionnaire. The beginning of the semester questionnaire contained two sections. The initial section of the beginning of the semester questionnaire asked questions exploring student perspectives on hospitality, in addition to

questions about the students and their personalities, their friendships, their family relationships, their church relationships, and their perspectives on technology, for a total of 22 questions. The second part of the beginning of the semester questionnaire was a spiritual inventory of an additional nine questions exploring the student's relationships both with God and their fellow man, namely, with both their Spiritual Formation professor and fellow students in the class. This same nine-question spiritual inventory would be given at the end of the semester, as well, to compare students' spiritual growth during their first semester at a Christian college. The answers to these questions were based on the Likert scale.

In addition to these surveys, an additional hour-long focus group interview was held with a select group of students who frequently attended weekly optional meals at the home of the professor throughout the semester. The focus group interview was held after finals were taken, with no benefit to the students other than a free drink at a café. The fifth and final chapter of this thesis-project, therefore, is an exploration of the results of this thesis-project, divided into four parts.

The first part of this fifth thesis-project chapter will examine survey results profiling students and their perspectives on Christian hospitality, community and technology. The second section of chapter 5 will describe the eleven dinners which took place at the professor's home during the course of the semester, including the format, the food served, transportation logistics, the students who came and did not come, dinner table conversations, the impact of technology on the dinners, and how the offer of hospitality was received. The third part of chapter five will compare the students' answers to the spiritual inventory questions at the beginning of the semester with their answers to the same questions at the end of the semester. Student answers will be divided into groups based on whether they attended any of the fellowship meals at the

professor's home or not, and if attended, whether they attended occasionally or frequently. My goal is to find out whether or not student participation in these optional meals resulted in measurable spiritual growth during the course of the semester, in terms of the student's view of their relationship to both God and to others in the class, including the professor. The fourth part of chapter five will explore how the results of this study might benefit churches and parachurch organizations which minister to college students, and especially how this study might benefit spiritual formation classes at Christian colleges.

### **Part 1: Beginning of the Semester Survey Results**

Our first step in examining the outcomes of this study is to investigate the results from the beginning of semester survey, which looked at student perspectives on Christian hospitality, community, and technology. This survey was given on September 18, 2018 to a total of 33 students combined from both the 8:30 AM class offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and the once weekly Tuesday night class. Some basic observations about the students surveyed in these two classes may be beneficial to understanding student perspectives on hospitality. In terms of their personality, most students, according to question 1, see themselves as neither extroverts nor introverts, but either as “mostly outgoing but slightly shy” (50%) or as “mostly shy, but somewhat outgoing” (just over 26%).<sup>1</sup> In other words, the vast majority do not see themselves as falling on the extremes of either extroversion or introversion. In question 4, an overwhelming majority of about 85% feel that they have close friends with whom they share deep relationship.<sup>2</sup> This question does not address where these friends are located, and it is possible that such friends

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1. See Appendix A, part I, entitled “Beginning of Semester Questionnaire.”

2. See Appendix A, part I.



might attend another college or live in the student's hometown if the student is not local. Over 70% of students, according to question 7, come from two-parent families who are not divorced.<sup>3</sup>

Since this study examines experiences with Christian hospitality, it is necessary to understand these students' perspectives on their church. Nearly 80% of students go to a church of less than 500 people in Sunday morning attendance, with half attending a church with 250 people or less.<sup>4</sup> The location of these churches was split between rural (nearly 27%), urban (just over 20%), and suburban (41%), with only one student in both classes attending a multi-site congregation.<sup>5</sup> When asked if the use of digital technology was important to them in worship (question 15), 40% of students stated that digital technology was either very important or somewhat important. Students reported their own frequency of attendance in question 9.<sup>6</sup> The students in the study attend weekly worship with a considerable amount of consistency, with over 60% reporting that, since their 6th grade year, their family attended Sunday worship at a local church virtually every week, with an additional 11% stating that they attended church on average three times a month.<sup>7</sup>

Survey questions number 13, 14 and 15, covered the students' experiences of hospitality in their home churches. When asked how many times the student had eaten a meal in the home of a non-related person in their church congregation, nearly a quarter answered "never" and another 12% stated "once or twice."<sup>8</sup> Nearly 40% had considerable experience with church

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3. See Appendix A, part I.

4. See Appendix A, part I.

5. See Appendix A, part I.

6. See Appendix A, part I.

7. See Appendix A, part I.

8. See Appendix A, part I.

hospitality, stating that they had eaten meals at the house of a fellow church member too many times to even count them all. Eating in the house of a pastor or youth pastor was much rarer. Over a third (38%) of students stated that they had never eaten in the home of a pastor or youth pastor, while just over 20% stated that they had done so once or twice.<sup>9</sup> About a quarter of the students had eaten at a pastor's home "several" times during the course of their upbringing. The offer of eating a weekly meal at a professor's house over the course of a semester, therefore, was, on average, a rather unique experience for most of the students taking the survey.

At the end of the semester, I invited about a dozen key students who had attended multiple meals in our home throughout the semester to a local coffee shop for an hour-long focus group interview.<sup>10</sup> I asked these students numerous questions about church, hospitality, and the Spiritual Formation class itself. Most of these students were in one of my two Spiritual Formation classes, but a few were students from a New Testament class, though all of these students had also taken a Spiritual Formation class with a different professor. I asked these students several questions about their church experiences with hospitality.

In the interview, I asked if students felt closely connected to their home church congregation.<sup>11</sup> One New Testament student, a female freshman, answered, "I do feel really close with the community at my home church...we live like 20 minutes, 25 minutes from my church, and so a group of us decided to have...a small group of people who lived in our area. And it started on Sunday evenings, we would get together, like this is families, and then...we would get together and I was at that time, I was kind of in between the ages of the kids and the adults

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9. See Appendix A, part I.

10. See Appendix A, part IV for focus group interview questions. See Appendix C for a transcript of the focus group interview.

11. See Appendix A, part IV.

and I would always sit with the adults. I was 16-17. And this community has slowly become like a church within a church and we just do life together. Like when we have birthdays, the people we invite are people from that small group and a bunch of us ended up going to the same schools, so we were in events together.”<sup>12</sup> The original host of this church group had moved, however, which this student lamented. She stated, “we actually haven’t gotten together as much anymore, which has been really hard. And I feel like all of us felt like we’re missing family, ‘cause we don’t get together anymore. It’s really sad but whenever there’s a really big life event happening, we always get the church group together to celebrate.”<sup>13</sup> The hospitable welcome in the small group within this student’s church created a feeling of home among fellow church members. Perhaps most unique about this student’s perspective is that she felt a closeness not necessarily to her teenage peers, but to the adults in the group.

In another interview question, the students were asked if they could think of times in their upbringing when they felt relationally closest to those in their home church congregation.<sup>14</sup> This same female freshman student from my New Testament class, who grew up as the child of missionaries in a third world country, responded, “I’d say that eating with the members of our church has been one of the strongest bonding experiences that we’ve done. We’ll spend a lot of time together but there’s nothing as genuinely necessary and intimate as eating together. I feel like if somebody asks you to eat with them in this kind of a culture...that shows that they have a lot of care for you because that’s a lot of time. A lot more time than someone might normally spend with you, like a full out meal. Not just coffee or saying hi in the church lobby but someone

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12. See Appendix C. 2018. Interview by author. Toccoa, Georgia. December 11th, 2018.

13. See Appendix C.

14. See Appendix A, part IV.

who takes you to a meal or provides a meal for you, it's several hours, maybe a whole afternoon or evening. And whenever we would get together with church people to do that, we'd be gone for like four or five hours."<sup>15</sup>

Another female student from the Tuesday night Spiritual Formation class grew up in the same church as the first student. In response to this same question about when students felt relationally the closest to their home church congregation, she said, "I would say that, yes, all the times where me or my family have gotten together with other families in our church and eaten with them...the time that you spend, it's not even just about the eating, it's about the intimacy where you're able to swap life stories. And get really real with one another and just really talk and, spend all that time together. I feel like I've grown a lot closer to the people that I've had the time to eat with and spend time like that than I am with any of the other families that we've never reached out to, or that haven't reached out to us. And I know that my family tries to make it a point to invite over new families who come to our church. That way, we can not only welcome them in but also get to know them ourselves because, you know, we like to become better friends with the people in our church family, and be united in that way."<sup>16</sup>

In an additional question about churches with the students in the focus group interview, the students were given an option of choosing between two hypothetical churches.<sup>17</sup> Church (A) was described as having 1000 people in attendance weekly, a dynamic speaker for a pastor, an excellent worship band, but few people at church (A) talk to a new visitor more than just simply saying hello. Church (B) was described as having 100 people in attendance weekly, a not-so-

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15. See Appendix C.

16. See Appendix C.

17. See Appendix A, part IV.

skillful speaker and music that is really outdated. But upon visiting, a new visitor is personally invited to lunch at the end of the service. The students in the focus group were asked which church they would choose, Church (A) or Church (B). One student, a female freshman in the New Testament class replied, “I would probably go to church B because Church B sounds like the church I grew up in...small. It really doesn’t matter how good the preacher is as long as he’s...preaching the word...it really doesn’t matter, like, the music, because you could worship to “On the Old Rugged Cross” (more) than you can worship to “Oceans” by Hillsong.”<sup>18</sup> A second female student enrolled in the Tuesday night Spiritual Formation class agreed: “I’d definitely go to church B because we are even told in the world how important the church is and we are not meant to walk through life alone and we need relationships. And so if Church A isn’t going to be inviting, and there’s not going to be real relationships there, then how are we growing in a community? So I’d rather go to Church B.”<sup>19</sup> A third student, a female freshman in the Tuesday night Spiritual Formation class also agreed, saying, “I would much rather go to Church B, one, because I grew up in a church like that and, two, I strongly believe that a church isn’t just a building, it’s a people group, so like, we’re called to be the church, and how are you supposed to be the church if you don’t have personal relationships with people? The church is just a building so...I want to feel welcome at a church that I visit and the personal relationships mean a lot to me.”<sup>20</sup> One student did disagree and chose Church (A) because the student grew up in a missionary family and, if the church was not one to be chosen as their permanent home congregation, she would rather be anonymous.

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18. See Appendix C.

19. See Appendix C.

20. See Appendix C.

In response to another question about the use of technology,<sup>21</sup> a male freshman Spiritual Formation student from the midwestern United States answered, “two of the most memorable experiences of any church that I’ve been at have been, one, where I was at a camp and the power went out and there was absolutely no technology, and the other, I was in another country and there was no power in the church building. So that kind of speaks to the fact that it (technology) is absolutely not needed, but there’s nothing inherently wrong with it, I don’t believe.”<sup>22</sup> This was consistent with student answers to question 15 of the beginning of semester survey, when only 40% of students stated that digital technology was either very important or somewhat important in congregational worship.<sup>23</sup>

Mirroring chapter one’s research about how technology impacts students, a few questions on the beginning of the semester survey provided opportunities for contemplation. On the second question of the survey, nearly 56% of students stated that they feel most recharged when they spend time with people, while another 35% of students stated that they feel most recharged when spending time in nature.<sup>24</sup> Less than 3% stated that they feel most recharged when spending time on digital media.<sup>25</sup> The third question was similar; it was based not on the feelings of students, but rather on how students in practice spend their free time. This question should reveal a more accurate assessment of student values regarding use of recreational time. This time, almost 59% stated that they spend most of their free time with people, while just over 26% of students stated

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21. See Appendix A, part IV.

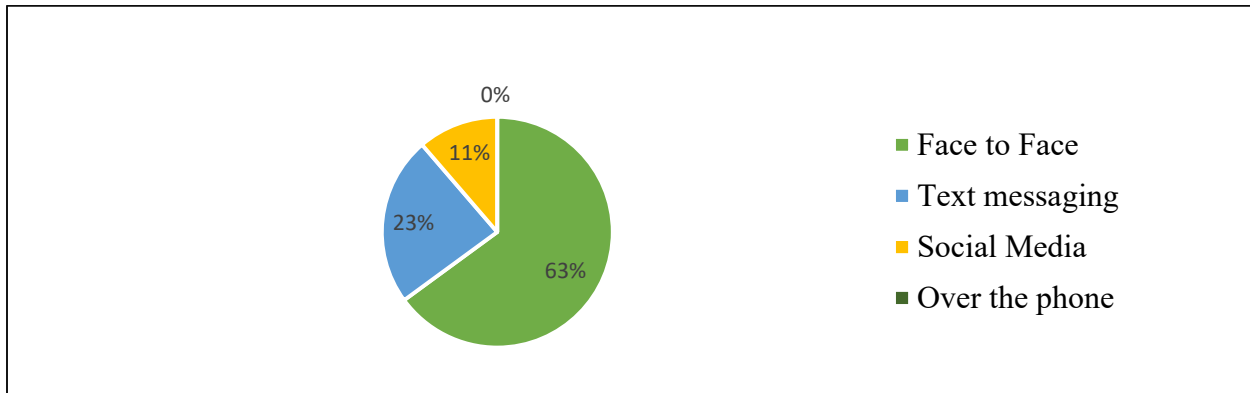
22. See Appendix C.

23. See Appendix A, part I.

24. See Appendix A, part I.

25. See Appendix A, part I.

that they spend most of their free time with digital media.<sup>26</sup> If 3% of students feel most recharged when spending free time on digital media, why is that over a quarter of the same students spend most of their free time with digital media?



**Figure 1: “My usual way of interacting with friends is...”**

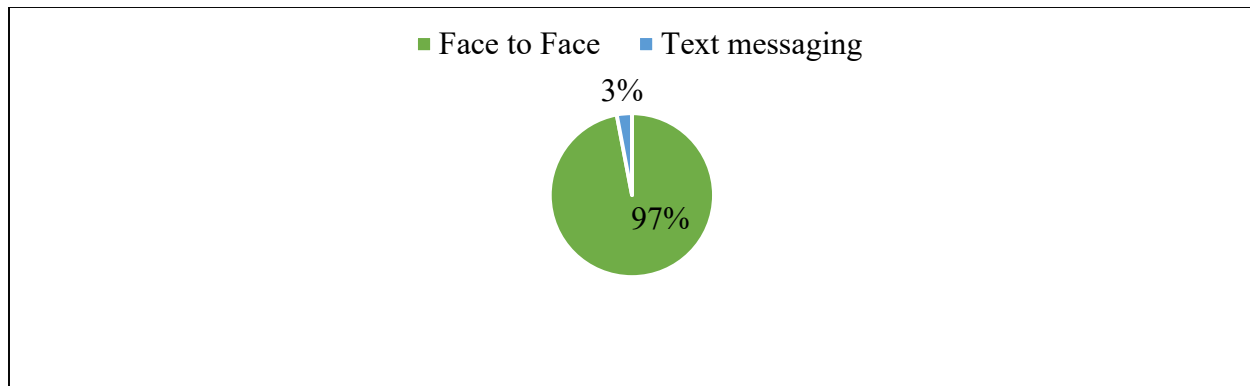
Questions five and six of the beginning of semester survey probe similar territory (see Appendix A, Part I, questions 5 and 6). When asked in question six about students’ preferred method of interacting with friends, less than 3% answered that they preferred interacting with friends through texting, while the remaining 97% students answered that they preferred interacting with friends face to face.<sup>27</sup> When looking not at their preferred method of interacting with friends, but rather their “usual” method of interacting with friends, only 63% stated that they spent time with people face to face, nearly 23% said that they usually interacted with friends by using text messaging, and another 11% usually interacted with friends by using social media.<sup>28</sup>

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26. See Appendix A, part I.

27. See Appendix A, part I.

28. See Appendix A, part I.



**Figure 2: "My preferred way of interacting with friends is..."**

Surely some of this discrepancy is explained by the fact that college students are not just interacting with residential students attending their own campus, but also with friends and family who do not live near their college campus. Nevertheless, it is worth acknowledging that to spend one's free time relating to individuals through technology at a distance means that one is, to some extent, substituting the time that could be spent face to face on campus with real persons with virtual, technology-based interaction. One could argue that technology is a wonderful tool that is used to perpetuate real relationship when two individuals in that relationship are not in close proximity. And yet, there is a cost to doing so. Theologically, one may wonder at the fact that the incarnation took place so long before the revolutions of mass communication technology that came with the telegraph, the telephone, the computer, and the smartphone-based communication systems of the past few centuries. Jesus on a screen today could certainly have reached more people than Jesus in the flesh, located in the rather small confines of 1st century Palestine. And yet, the incarnation, as a limited, local expression of God's presence on earth, is overwhelmingly central to Christian faith.

From the Christian perspective of the greatest commandment of loving God and loving one's neighbor, how students spend their free time is no small question. According to our small sample size, Christian students are aware that spending time with people face-to-face, or



incarnationally, is of great importance, as stated in the beginning of the semester survey in questions 2, 3, 5, and 6. But the advent of smartphone technology, as noted in chapter one, creates real tension in the lives of today's students. Remember that nearly 60% of the students taking the survey suggest that they spend most of their free time with people. And if almost 100% of the students in this study prefer to spend time with friends face to face in the flesh, and nearly 63% suggest that they usually interact with friends face to face, then the beginning of the semester survey questions on technology perspectives are rather illuminating. Note that in question 17, almost 1/3 of the students surveyed revealed that they spend four or more hours daily on an electronic device in front of a screen, and this question excluded both television watching and doing homework from the total number of screen-time hours. That amount of time weekly is the equivalent of almost a  $\frac{3}{4}$  time job (or more). Another 41% of the students stated that they spend between two and three hours in front of a screen daily, not including watching television or doing homework. The same amount of time weekly amounts to a part-time job. Such "screens" are described in the question to include smartphones, tablets or laptops. These distinctions are important. Television watching can be a communal activity, particularly in a college dormitory, where many students can only access a television in a common room. It is far less likely that spending time in front of a device with a smaller screen, such as a smartphone, tablet, or a laptop, would be a communal activity; the screen size is too small.

These survey statistics regarding students' use of technology are striking. Nearly three quarters of students surveyed spend at least two hours daily alone with a screen, a notable discrepancy compared to the face-to-face time they prefer. Furthermore, before the common use of the internet in the late 1990's, and especially before internet savvy smartphones appeared approximately a decade later, spending any time on the web was impossible. If 75% of students

in this study spend at least two hours per day surfing the web, what would they have done with that same amount of free time ten or twenty years earlier? And this question does not even include playing video games on a console in front of a television, which for some students may account for an additional considerable number of hours per week.

Other statistics in this same section of perspectives on technology were similarly illuminating. In question 22, a narrative question without multiple choice options, nearly 1/3 of students stated that they had made relationships with friends online and had sustained these relationships solely through online interaction.<sup>29</sup> All of these students also admitted that these online relationships lacked the depth of face-to-face relationships. Question 21, a narrative question asking students if smartphone technology affects their sleep patterns in a negative manner, revealed that over 56% of the students surveyed admitted that their smartphones negatively impacted their sleep, with many of them answering in an apologetic manner, as if they know their phone use at night is bad for them, but do so anyway.

Smartphone technology also affects the way students interact with others over meals. Question 18 asks how often students check their phones during meals with friends.<sup>30</sup> Over 60% admitted to checking their phones at least three times when eating meals with friends, while only 6% stated that they never check their phones during meals. Again, if students prefer to spend their free time face to face with others, their answers to this survey question reveals that technology interferes even when they are with other people face to face. Question 20 asks a similar question applied to family meals rather than meals with friends.<sup>31</sup> Just over a quarter of

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29. See Appendix A, part I.

30. See Appendix A, part I.

31. See Appendix A, part I.

all students check their phones three or more times during family meals. While students are much less prone to let their devices intrude on the family meal than on a meal with friends, it is worth mentioning just how rare the family meal is. When asked in question 8 how many times weekly students ate an evening meal at home together with their family members during middle and high school, 27% indicated that they did so just once a week or less.<sup>32</sup> The same number, 27%, ate the family meal at home together nearly every night. Meals with friends or family are face-to-face activities, and even these are diminished by the intrusion of the technology of a virtual world. Question 19 asks if students check their phones during church. Just over half of all the students stated that they at least check their phones “occasionally, if someone really needs me,” and some do so with frequency.<sup>33</sup> How often does someone really need someone else during a church service? Only a quarter of the students stated that they turn off their phones in church. Another 20% state that they only check their phone during church to read scripture on a smartphone-based Bible application. If congregational worship is a time to relate both to fellow believers and to God, smartphone technology again is at least interfering in the congregational worship event, which is by nature a relational activity.

## **Part 2: Weekly Dinners**

It is now necessary to describe the outcomes of the meals offered to students. As described in chapter 4, the original intent of the project was to teach the Tuesday night class in our home, with food and hospitable welcome offered to the students in the course weekly during the class session. A Tuesday/Thursday conventional class was to be held on campus, with all

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32. See Appendix A, part I.

33. See Appendix A, part I.

students filling out the same questionnaires as those in the home-based class. While the logistics of this original idea were impossible from the college's perspective, what I initially perceived to be the second-best option had its merits. Our second option was to hold all class sessions for both classes on campus, while providing an open invitation almost weekly to dinner at the professor's house, with a free ride and free food. This was, in a sense, a great risk, because the dinner provided no class credit, and because my home is nearly a 25-minute drive from the college campus. Furthermore, I only found out the week before classes started that my suggestion of a home-based class, initially approved by the college's Institutional Review Board, did not mean that the logistics of transportation, insurance, and other factors were amenable to the college's administrative guidelines. The home-based class idea had to be shelved, and the Tuesday night class would have to be taught in a campus classroom just as the other Spiritual Formation class was.

Classes started the last week of August 2018, leaving little time to come up with an alternative, but, along with my wife, I hatched a plan. The plan was simple, but the outcome was uncertain. I would invite all the students in both of my Foundations of Spiritual Formation classes, along with all of the students in my Introduction to New Testament class, to a fully-optional weekly dinner for no class credit at my home, and, if necessary, I would provide students with transportation to and from campus to my home. I recruited a former student and good friend to be an additional driver. I announced my invitation in all my classes and, additionally, sent a mass email to all my students weekly with the procedure for transportation, the meeting time, and occasionally the menu for the evening meal. The meal itself was offered on Sundays or Mondays, depending on the week. While this plan was not my original ideal arrangement, the great blessing it contained was that students had a choice as to whether they

came or not. Their attendance at the meal was not in any way connected to their attendance in the class. Roll would not be taken, credit (extra or otherwise) would not be given, and, in most cases, students already had a meal available to them on campus due to their campus meal plans. The students would not go hungry by missing the event, nor would they save money by coming to our house. The risk was the very real possibility that few, if any students at all, would ever come.

I was nervous as I drove to campus to pick up students on our first Sunday night meal, offered on September 9th, 2018. I had received an email from a student suggesting that she and another student were coming, which was encouraging. Nevertheless, I was certain we would have less than five students present. My wife Katie made enough food for twenty people just in case. In notes regarding that first dinner, I wrote that we worked hard on our yard all weekend leading up to the meal, cutting all the grass, pressure washing in the backyard, and setting up our back porch, both upstairs and downstairs, as eating areas for students, with multiple chairs, a couch, and a porch swing as places for eating together. As I pulled into the campus to meet my student volunteer driver that Sunday night in September, there was a surprisingly large crowd of students assembled, waiting for rides. We hosted sixteen students that first night for homemade baked spaghetti pie, bread, salad, and lemonade squares for dessert. Our three children ate alongside the students, who were free to eat inside at three different tables, or outside on either the upstairs back porch or the downstairs back porch. The 25-minute drive, seemingly a deterrent, was an easy way to make conversation with the students in our car, and we arrived at the house at about 7 PM. There was no agenda, just a prayer of blessing for the food, and a full 90 minutes of eating and fellowship. Conscious of study and work schedules, I had promised the students to have them back to campus by 9:00 PM Sunday night.

We kept a similar schedule and format throughout the semester, meeting for dinner at our house eleven total times, having had to cancel a couple of dinners because of breaks in the academic calendar or because of an out of town commitment in our family schedule. Whether we met on Sundays or Mondays, we always picked up students at 6:30 and returned them to campus by 9:00 PM, giving us about an hour and a half to eat and talk in our home. There was never any agenda for conversation, no Bible study, no set discussion or class content presented. The format was simply to eat and talk.

While the format never really changed, there were several variables of menu, attendance, weather (which affected who came and where people sat to eat, changing the nature and intimacy of interaction), and the quality of conversation. In regard to the menu, my wife graciously agreed to cook homemade food for the students, as she had for many years in campus ministry. Katie served, on various nights, chicken pot pie, chili with cornbread, jambalaya, baked macaroni and cheese, enchilada casserole, Italian beef noodle casserole, meat and potato loaf, and French toast strada, always with a homemade dessert ready, such as oatmeal cake, snickerdoodle brownies, chocolate lava cake, or cracker toffee. Each week we served bread and salad on the side, along with sweet tea to drink. It was important to us that the food be homemade, as a show of hospitality is intensified by the offering of homemade food, which requires more effort and personal touch. This was a challenge on the night my wife was out of town for a ministry board meeting, and I had to make the meal myself. I am only an adequate cook, not an excellent one like my wife, Katie. Still, it was important to us that the food be homemade, even if the offerings were simple to prepare. There is a not-so-subtle difference between offering people delivery pizza and offering them a pizza made by hand, as an example. Similarly, if a sick person is visited by a friend, are they moved more by an offer of a can of chicken noodle soup, or a pot of

homemade chicken noodle soup? At times, a can may be all one has to offer, and yet, interestingly, homemade food is often much cheaper than either pre-packaged store-bought food or take-out from a restaurant.

Simply put, hospitality is more effective when one offers guests more than convenience foods. Hospitality is decidedly inconvenient, as it is a show of love of neighbor. Self-love is often quite convenient. Love of neighbor, while it may feel personally enriching, is usually not convenient, and yet we are called and compelled as Christians to practice it. Inviting college students over to one's house for a free meal, however, is a small sacrifice compared to those willing to go the extra mile at great expense to fulfill the calling of the good Samaritan. Christians who visit prisoners regularly, who take in foster children and treat them like their own, who feed the truly hungry, who suffer in third world conditions to offer expertise in medicine, or dentistry, or engineering,...these are true acts of hospitality requiring great sacrifice. But even small acts of hospitality, such as Jesus's suggestion of cold cup of water in Matthew 10:42, are not without meaning.

The attendance at our weekly dinners also varied. At times we had just enough food to give to the rather large crowd which gathered, and at other times we had a surplus because we had under ten students, which often meant that students went home with copious amounts of leftovers. The nights we had large crowds brought a unique, enjoyable energy to our gatherings. One night, we had ten students present for a Sunday dinner in October. One of our Spiritual formation students, a music major, played songs on the piano, which led my 10-year old daughter to play songs she knew for everyone. My youngest son, then 7 years old, brought his bean bag chair and Lego creations downstairs from his room for all the students to see. Interestingly, my notes about that evening revealed that three students asked for the wireless

internet password. I reluctantly gave them the password, but at times this caused students to engage less in conversation, being immersed in a small screen-based world. At other times, the use of smartphones during our weekly dinners created opportunities to show one another pictures or videos, which sometimes led to trivial conversations and at other times led to new discoveries about the life of the person showing pictures and videos.

That same October night, one female student in my Tuesday night Spiritual Formation class said she loved coming over to our house for weekly dinners because it was the “only family thing” she does in college. One student who came was a non-Christian, a rarity at the college, which requires one’s personal testimony of Christian faith as part of the application process. Conversation that night was, to some extent, driven by a few minority students, who shared humorous stories about misconceptions of race and racial differences. These conversations were joyous rather than tense, as is often the case when discussing similar subjects on social media and elsewhere. Perhaps food and conversation in a home lessened the tension? One student made an intriguing side comment about the evening which I later asked her to write down again in her own words. She wrote, “Being in a house gives me a sense of home and family. It gets lonely being away from your friends and family. So being surrounded by others in a warm, inviting house renews my spirit and my loneliness is gone.” The same student also asked if we would still do Sunday night dinners when the semester was over.

Another large dinner on Sunday, October 14th, 2018 brought at least 20 students to our house for dinner. As was occasionally the case, a few students who showed up for a ride offered to drive so that everyone could fit. Though a few students left early that night after eating, one student had brought a guitar, and about a dozen students sat with him out on the back porch singing along to worship songs he was playing, as the moon and stars emerged in the night sky.



One student, a freshman female from my New Testament class, remarked to me that she had not been in a home since the beginning of the semester and that the experience was wonderful. I wrote these words in my notes about that evening, “I loved the natural community that took place...the singing and conversation were so organic. The moonrise over the back porch was striking. The regulars were there but many were first timers.”

Other weekly dinners were much smaller, with under ten total students present. Occasionally this was caused by less than ideal weather conditions, or by heavy student workloads at certain times of the semester. Nevertheless, the smaller sized crowd often led to deeper, more serious conversations. There was a small core group of students who came to nearly all of the dinners, so they seemed to feel the most at home. The focus group interview at the end of the semester at a local coffeeshop demonstrates many of those same students’ feelings about their level of comfort in our home. I asked this small group of students what their initial impression of my invitation to my home for dinner was.<sup>34</sup> One Spiritual Formation student, a female freshman who had started at Toccoa Falls College after a year of community college in her home state answered, “I was a little weirded out at first because I had never like been invited to one of my professor’s houses before. But it wasn’t like a bad weird, I was like, okay, that’s different. Like I’ve never experienced that at the community college. It was just like, go to school, and then come back home and do my own thing. But after we started doing that, and I started coming, I became friends with more people in the class...I was just able to become more personal and friendly with other people, including you (the professor), so that...allowed relationships to grow between the professor and the students which just improved the class in general, I think.”<sup>35</sup>

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34. See Appendix A, part IV.

Another female Spiritual Formation student answered, “I told my friend group from back home, my church group, and they were all like, “well, my professors don’t care enough about me like that. And so it kind of shows how much you care and...how much you invest in your students, and how, like, your job is not just to teach, I guess, but is to invest in us as Christians as well.”<sup>36</sup> Another of my freshman New Testament students, a female, answered, “when you first said you were going to invite us over to your house, I didn’t believe you. You were like, “I’ll totally have you guys over for dinner,” and I was like, “yeah, sure, Professor Grady, we’ll see if that ever happens!”<sup>37</sup> I asked her if she thought at the time that I was exaggerating or even kidding, and this same student answered, “Something that people say but they don’t intend to follow up on. But then, when you, like, made good on it, I was really relieved, because, like, all throughout high school I had really personal relationships with all my teachers, and, so, getting to go over to your house every week for dinner this semester was a huge part, in like, making me feel welcome and at home at this school.”<sup>38</sup> For this student, eating dinner in a professor’s home reminded her of the close relationships she had with teachers in her Christian high school.

Another question that was asked in the focus group interview was whether it was difficult for the student to feel comfortable in another person’s home.<sup>39</sup> One student, a freshman male Spiritual Formation student, replied, “some of my closest friends back at high school have the kind of parents that, when you get to their house, they’ll tell you to make yourself at home. And if they come back a minute later and you’re not sitting down with your shoes off, they’ll kind of

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35. See Appendix C.

36. See Appendix C.

37. See Appendix C.

38. See Appendix C.

39. See Appendix A, part IV.

yell at you for not making yourself at home. So, I've become, like, used to just, if they say, "make yourself at home," like, okay, shoes come off, I am just, like comfortable. This is almost as much my house as it is theirs, 'cause they give me the right, so I think that helps. Yeah, I felt very welcome, I felt very, I could just talk with whoever...you, your kids, other students, just enjoy the experience."<sup>40</sup> A freshman female student replied to the same question by saying this, "I think it was kind of easy, 'cause the first night of, like, class, with our icebreakers, you already kind of started, like making fun, and poking fun at us and that kind of breaks...I feel like that, like making fun of people, not, like, really hard but like easy jokes...that's how you bond with people. Just little jokes here and there, like, so it kind of helped. Like, you already kind of had a feeling about us. And then, so you inviting us was kind of easy going in to it."<sup>41</sup>

I asked the same question again about whether it was difficult to feel comfortable in someone else's home, and a Spiritual Formation student, a freshman female replied, "Maybe the first day. But then I could tell right away that y'all genuinely cared about every person that came into your house. That you wanted them to feel at home and that you wanted to get to know them."<sup>42</sup>

After asking this question, I probed a bit further, asking what other students on campus, those who were not in any of my three fall 2018 classes, thought about the invitation to dinner.<sup>43</sup> One student, a freshman female in my New Testament class, laughed as she recalled that other students were jealous. A freshman female in the Tuesday night Spiritual Formation class answered this same question by saying, "I actually have some interesting input. 'Cause not only

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40. See Appendix C.

41. See Appendix C.

42. See Appendix C.

43. See Appendix A, part IV.

did, like other college students seem jealous about it, my high school friends, when I went home and told them about it, they even thought it was cool. And I thought they would think it was weird, because like, they're younger and haven't been to college yet, but they were like, "Oh my God, that's so sweet! That's awesome that you're, like, having that experience and everything, so even high school students seemed, like, excited about it and they don't even know you."<sup>44</sup> Again, a meal in a professor's house is a seemingly small gesture of hospitality, but students found the offer more meaningful than I had expected.

Of the 35 Spiritual Formation students who filled out the end of the semester questionnaire, 18 of the students never came to a dinner.<sup>45</sup> An additional three students came just once during the semester, four students came twice, five came three or four times, and five students came more than four times.<sup>46</sup> At times, students would bring other students I did not know, or would bring students who I had taught in previous semesters. Though I did not ask students specifically to invite other students, I welcomed their presence. At the smaller dinners, where fewer students came, but most were frequent attenders, we often had conversations about deep theological subjects. Conversation topics included in my notes from these evenings were the nature of Christian worship and denominational differences. At times, the conversation at these smaller dinners was not so much intellectually or spiritually deep so much as it was relationally comfortable. At one Monday night dinner the week after Thanksgiving, the conversation was filled with laughter as we all discussed Thanksgiving traditions, one student's

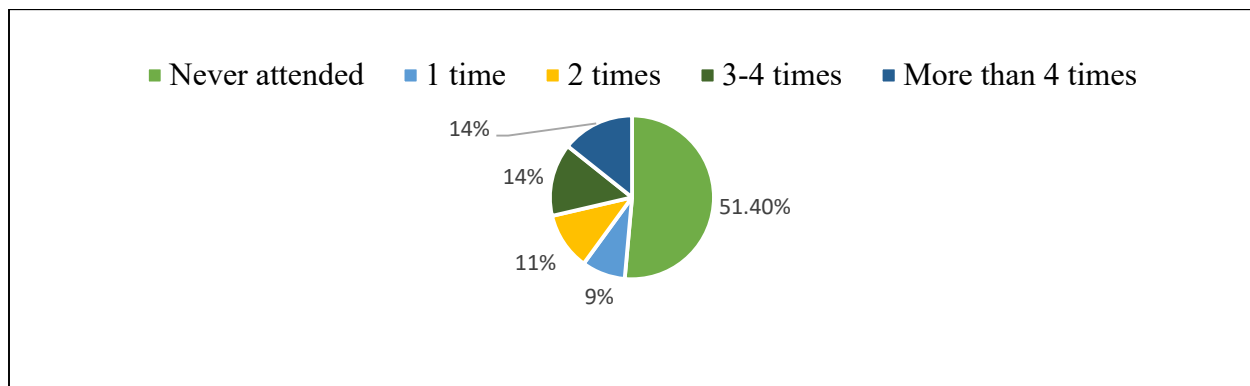
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44. See Appendix C.

45. See Appendix A, part II, "End of Semester Questionnaire."

46. See Appendix A, part II.

humorous food phobias, and, of all things, the products for sale in the catalogs present in the seatback pockets of commercial airplanes.



**Figure 3: How many times students attended dinner during the semester**

In the focus group interview at the end of the semester, most of the students who frequently attended our weekly dinners were present with me to answer questions at a local café. A majority of these students attended dinners five or more times during the semester. When I asked the Spiritual Formation students how their experience of the class would have been different if they had never come to dinner at our house, one freshman female, who rarely missed a dinner, answered, “I don’t think I would be able to joke around with everybody as much as we do. Like, I really feel like we’ve sort of become almost like this mini family, even how messed up we all are! It’s really been nice getting to know each other and laughing at the table. And with food...that’s a lot of community right there and it’s very intentional. And that’s really something I can appreciate at the Sunday night dinners.”<sup>47</sup>

Another Spiritual Formation student, a freshman male answered the question of how the class would be different had he never come to dinner at our house. He brought up the importance of being able to connect the private persona of the professor with the content of the professor’s teaching in class. He said, “when teachers tell a story about their family, like random events that

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47. See Appendix C.

happen in their life, a lot of times, you hear it, and it's like, that's interesting. But there's no backstory, it doesn't seem relevant. But then, when we were actually at your house, and saw it playing out, it was actually like "oh, this actually happens! It's real!" And also, I think, knowing the professor in a deeper way helps you understand where he is coming from and what he is teaching."<sup>48</sup> For this student, the content of class material came to life in the home of the professor around his family. This aspect of the dinners was an important part of the results of the project, namely, that Spiritual Formation students came to know their professor very well. Knowing one's professor well can be seen as important in all subjects, but it is particularly significant in a discipline as intensely personal and relationship-oriented as Christian Spiritual Formation.

In the end of the semester questionnaire, students answered the same questions they answered in the beginning of the semester questionnaire, along with a few additional questions related to the weekly dinners at the professor's house. At the end of the semester, student questionnaires were sorted into groups based on how many students attended dinners at the professor's house.<sup>49</sup> About half of the class attended dinners at least once, and the rest, of course, never attended. Of the students who did attend dinners at least once, about 15% attended 3 or 4 times and another 15% attended more than four times out of the eleven total dinners. In the end of the semester questionnaire, students were asked to evaluate the statement: "Now that the semester is at an end, I feel like I know my Spiritual Formation professor very well."<sup>50</sup> 100% of the students who attended dinners more than three times either answered "agree" (20% of their

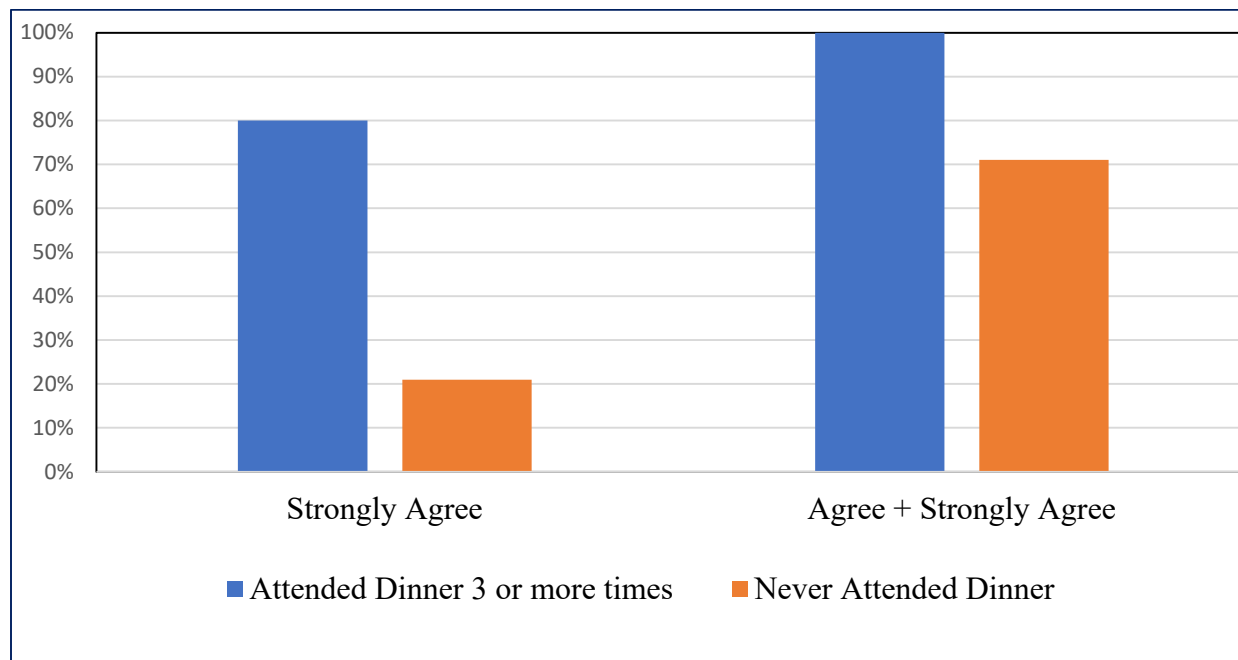
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48. See Appendix C.

49. See Appendix A, part II.

50. See Appendix A, part II.

answers), or “strongly agree” (80% of their answers). As for students who never came to dinner who evaluated the same statement, only just over 21% answered “strongly agree” while another 50% answered “agree” for a total of just over 71%, nearly a 30% difference.

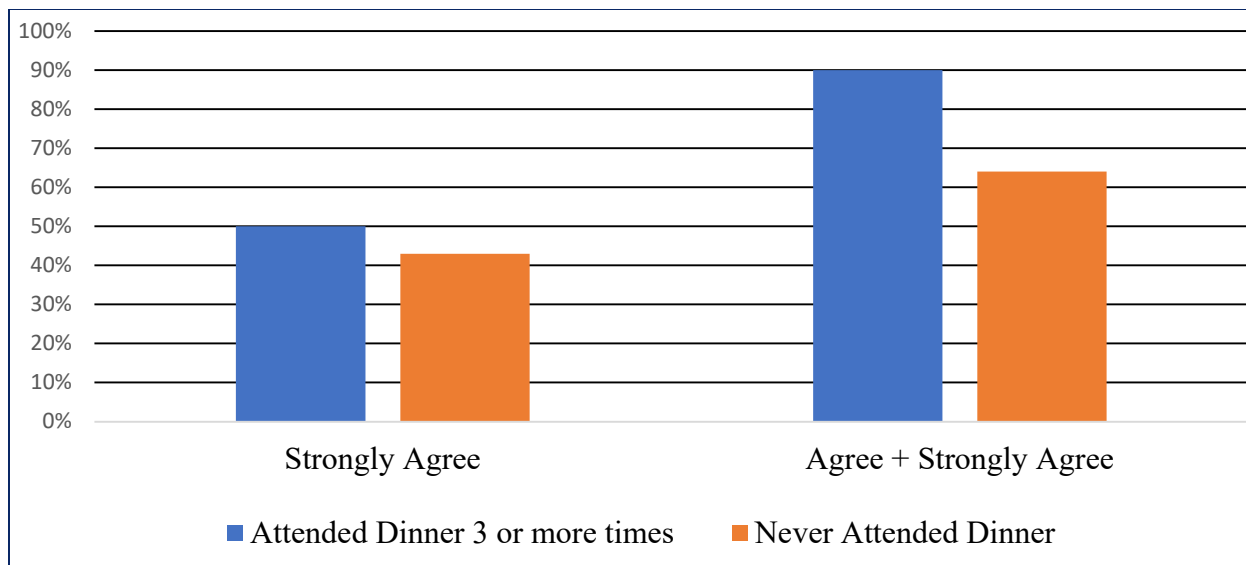


**Figure 4: "Now that the semester is at an end, I feel like I know my Spiritual Formation professor very well."**

At the end of the semester, students were also asked to evaluate this statement: “Now that the semester is at an end, I feel like my Spiritual Formation professor knows me very well.”<sup>51</sup> 50% of those who attended dinners more than three times answered “strongly agree,” while another 40% of those who attended three or more times answered “agree,” for a total of 90% overall in the category of agree. Of those who never attended dinners, almost 43% answered the same question with “strongly agree,” while another 21% answered “agree,” for a total of just over 64% overall in the category of agree. This was a notable, though not entirely unexpected difference.

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51. See Appendix A, part II.



**Figure 5: "Now that the semester is at an end, I feel like my Spiritual Formation professor knows me very well."**

The dynamics of how hospitality affects the depth of relationship between professor and student also emerged in unique ways in the focus group interview with students who had attended dinners with great frequency. The third Spiritual Formation student who answered the question of how the class would be different had the students never come to dinner at our house was a freshman male. This student initially had a difficult time meeting new people at our dinners, but he felt very comfortable talking to my two youngest children. By the end of the semester, he had become much more comfortable talking to his fellow students, and indeed became a bit of a social networker in his Spiritual Formation class. When asked how the class would have been different had he never attended a dinner at our house, he answered by saying, "coming to Spiritual Formation class and having dinner with (the) professor has made me more comfortable and more personalized coming to class. If I may have not gone to dinner, I may have dreaded the class and felt uncomfortable with everyone and not really having a deep relationship with others. It definitely has encouraged me to come to class more often and look forward to it. Definitely that has made me, like, more comfortable socializing with others...sitting down,



having dinner with others gives you that special bonding that you just wouldn't get back in the dorms, or at the college.”<sup>52</sup>

One feature of our weekly dinners was how much our own children enjoyed them, bringing their new toys or Lego creations for visitors to see, or playing musical instruments for the guests. My oldest son often asked to accompany me when driving the students back to campus at night, one time remarking that he enjoyed hosting students weekly because it reminded him of our campus ministry days at Appalachian State in Boone, North Carolina, five years before. We found during the course of the fall semester 2018 that our children deepened the hospitable welcome that our students experienced in our home.

### **Part 3: Spiritual Inventory Results**

It is now necessary to evaluate the contrast between the students' answers to the spiritual inventory questions at both the beginning of the semester as well as at the end of the semester. In order to match the anonymous questionnaires to the same student, students created a code name at the beginning of the semester consisting of a chosen color, and a chosen animal, written on to the top of the questionnaire. Students were encouraged to think of the most unique color/animal combination possible, and then to write it on their class syllabus so they could find it to use at the end of the semester to label their end of the semester questionnaire. In this way, student responses at the beginning and end of the semester could be matched, while anonymity could be maintained.

In this section of chapter 5, student answers to both sets of identical questionnaires will be divided into four categories, including the answers of the students who never attended a meal

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52. See Appendix C.

at the professor's house, the answers of those who attended one of the eleven weekly meals once or twice during the semester, the answers of those who attended three or more of the weekly meals, and, finally, the total of all answers as a whole. The students were asked at both the beginning and the end of the semester to evaluate nine different statements according to the Likert scale. These statements fall into three different categories regarding the student's individual relationship to God, their relationships with other students in the Spiritual Formation class, and their relationships to their Spiritual Formation professor. Again, the goal of this doctoral thesis is to discover whether or not student participation in these optional meals resulted in measurable spiritual growth during the course of the semester, in terms of the student's view of their relationship to both God and to others in the class, including the professor teaching the Spiritual Formation class.

The first category of statements regarding the student's individual relationship with God included statements 1 ("I feel very close to God right now"), statement 5 ("God feels very real to me right now"), statement 6 ("I feel like God is someone who listens to me"), statement 7 ("I feel like God is someone who responds to me"), statement 8 ("I feel that I currently have a strong knowledge of God's truth"), and statement 9 ("I feel that I currently have a strong knowledge of how God's truth applies to my spiritual life").<sup>53</sup> Again, all the students in both Spiritual Formation classes were taught the exact same class content, with identical reading assignments and homework in practicing the spiritual disciplines.

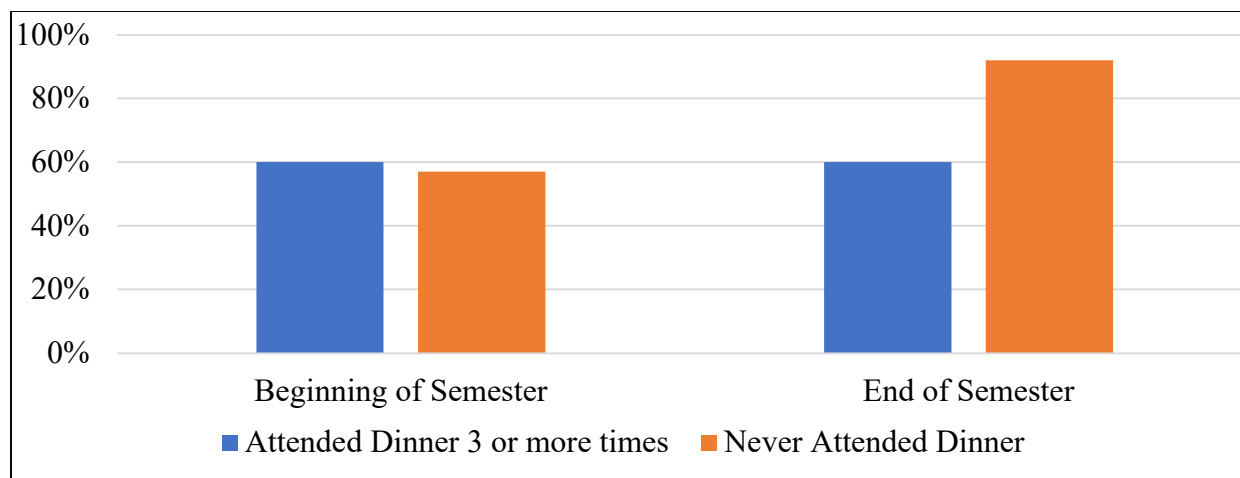
In regard to these six statements, it was rare that students in any category evaluated these statements by stating that they "disagree" or "strongly disagree" either at the beginning of the semester or at the end of the semester with these largely positive spiritual statements. This is

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53. See Appendix A, part III, "Questionnaire for both the Beginning and End of the Semester."

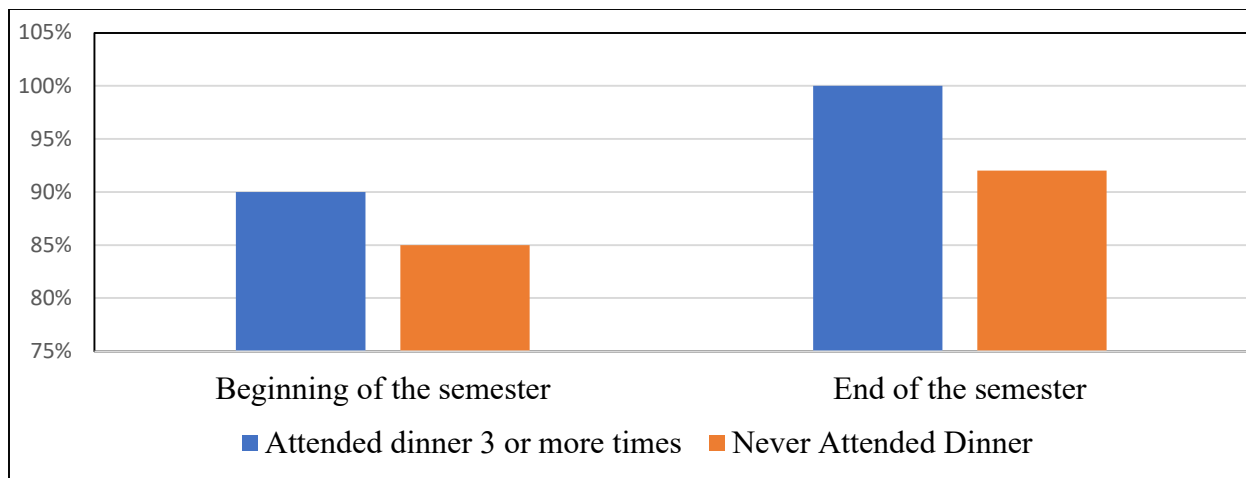
likely attributable to two different factors. First, Toccoa Falls College requires a statement of Christian faith in the student application process, so that both students and faculty identify openly as Christian believers. Second, Christian students may feel pressure to sound like they feel spiritually astute when they do not actually feel that way. Therefore, Christian students at Toccoa Falls College may tend to largely agree with positive statements such as the ones listed in this paragraph, either because they are strong in their belief already, or, to some extent, because they feel that they should sound as if they are spiritually strong.

In regard to the first statement (“I feel very close to God right now”), a little over 57% of students who never attended the meal events offered at the professor’s house either agreed or strongly agreed with the first statement at the beginning of the semester, a number which grew to over 92% at the end of the semester, or grew over 61 percent. This demonstrates notable growth in the spiritual lives of these students, perhaps due to Spiritual Formation class and assignments, but also chapel attendance, other Bible assignments, church involvement, and relationships with other Christian students. 60% of students who attended weekly fellowship meals at the professor’s house agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I feel very close to God right now” at the beginning of the semester, a number unchanged at the end of the semester. In other words, students who were not a part of the fellowship meals grew in their feelings of closeness to God throughout the semester significantly more than those who did attend said meals with frequency.



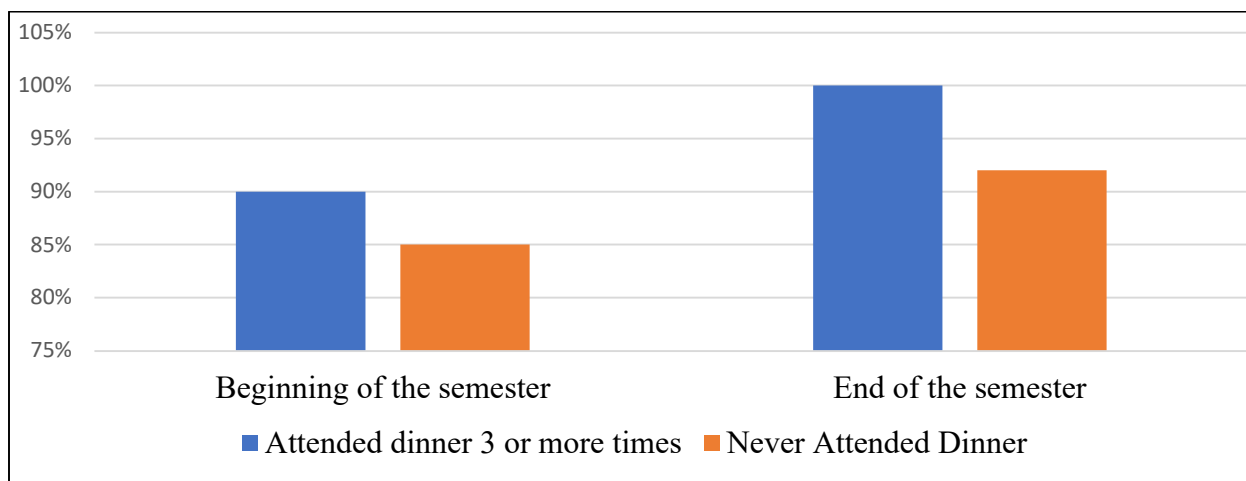
**Figure 6: “I feel very close to God right now.”**

Approximately 85% of Spiritual Formation students who never attended weekly dinners either agreed or strongly agreed with statement 5 (“God feels very real to me right now”) at the beginning of the semester, a number which grew among this group to almost 92% at the end of the semester. Among those who attended three or more meals at the professor’s house during the semester, the numbers were quite similar, though slightly higher. 90% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “God feels very real to me right now” at the beginning of the semester, and a full 100% agreed or strongly agreed with the same statement at the end of the semester. These numbers are high for both groups both at the beginning and end of the semester, likely attributable to a number of factors at a Christian college, including Bible and theology classes, small groups, Christian professors and a strong Christian environment for students.



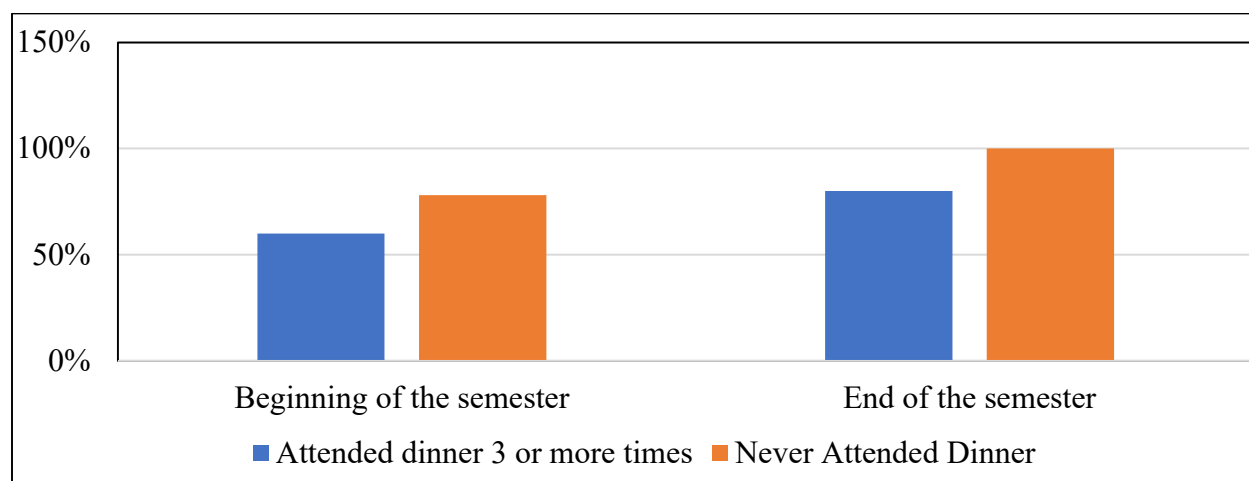
**Figure 7: "God feels very real to me right now."**

The “agree” and “strongly agree” numbers for statement 6 (“I feel like God is someone who listens to me”) are similarly high at both the beginning and end of the semester for both groups. Over 85% of Spiritual Formation students who never attended weekly dinners either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement at the beginning of the semester, while over 92% said the same at the end of the semester. Among students who attended dinners three times or more, the numbers both started and ended higher. 90% of these students agreed or strongly agreed with this statement at the beginning of the semester, a number which grew to 100% at the end of the semester.

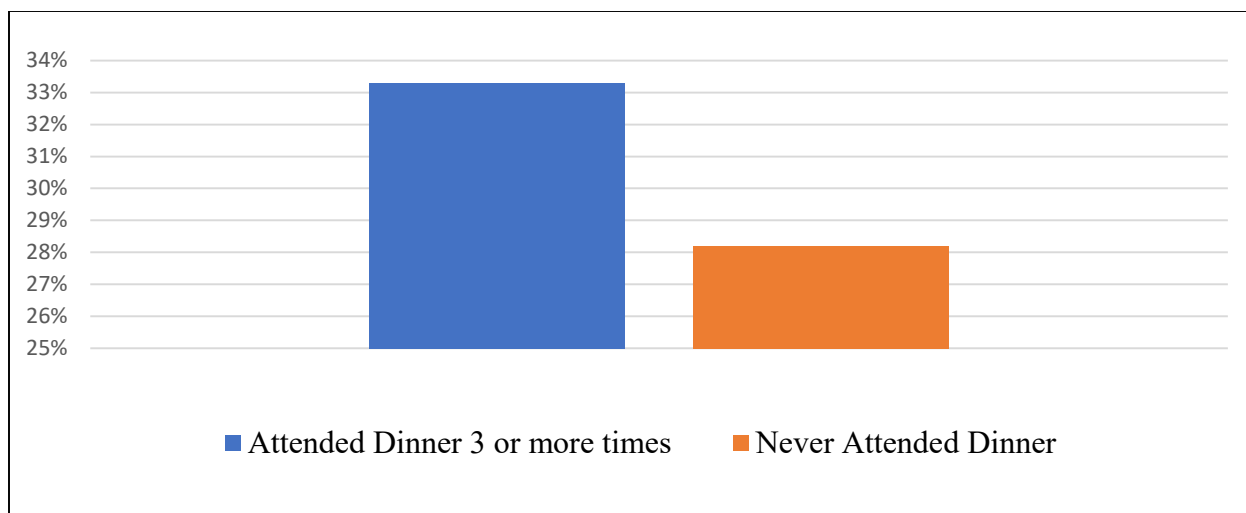


**Figure 8: "I feel like God is someone who listens to me."**

When evaluating statement 7 (“I feel like God is someone who responds to me”), almost 78% of the students who never attended a fellowship meal at the professor’s house during the course of the semester agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while a full 100% of the same students agreed at the end of the semester. In contrast, 60% of the students who attended these dinners three times or more during the semester agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I feel like God is someone who responds to me” at the beginning of the semester, a number which grew to 80% at the end of the semester. While these groups started in different places in regard to agreeing with the statement, the growth in agreeing or strongly agreeing was quite similar.



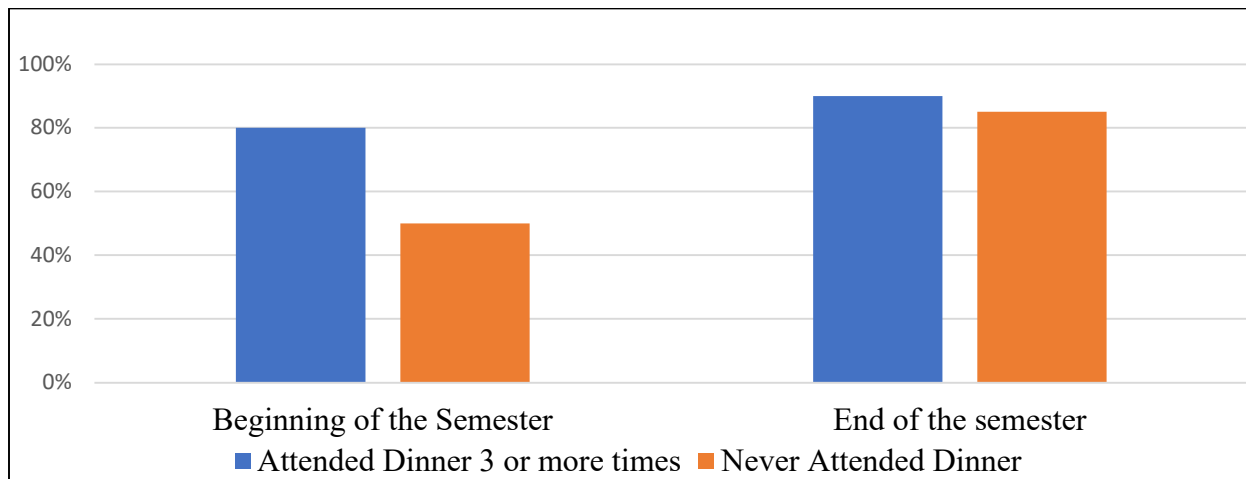
**Figure 9: "I feel like God is Someone who responds to me."**



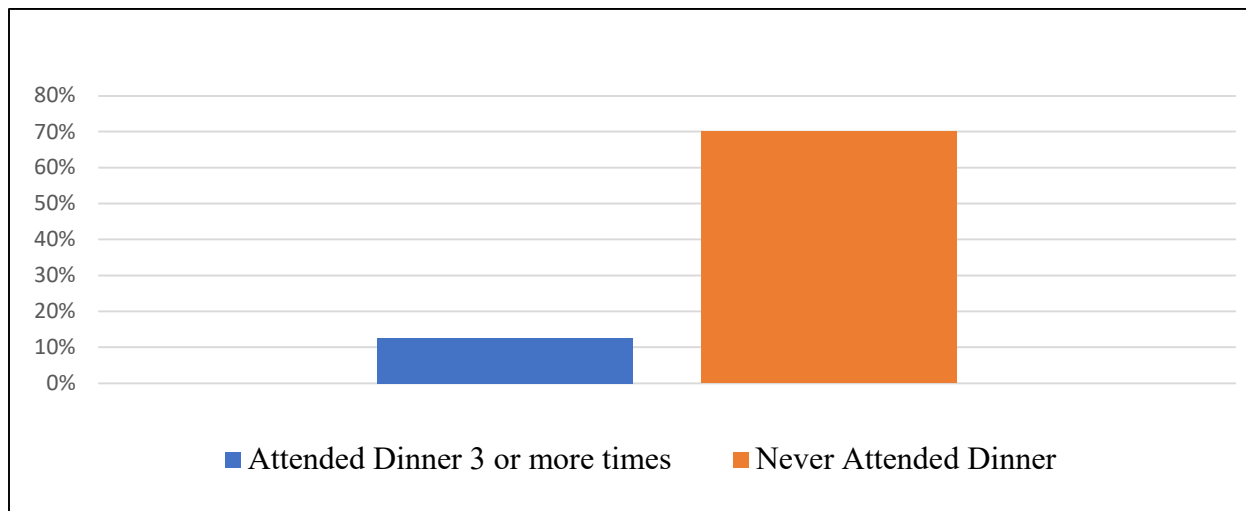
**Figure 10: Percent Growth, Beginning to End of Semester "I feel like God is Someone who responds to me."**

Statement 8 reads "I feel that I currently have a strong knowledge of God's truth." In terms of its wording, Statement 8 could possibly be interpreted to cover more of the intellectual realm of knowledge of God's truth. 50% of students who never once attended weekly fellowship meals at the professor's house declared that they agreed or strongly agreed with statement 8 in the beginning of the semester questionnaire, while 85% of those same students agreed or strongly agreed with the same statement at the end of the semester. It is worth noting, in terms of growth in spiritual knowledge, that over 28% of this same group of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement at the beginning of the semester, a number which decreased to 0% at the end of the semester. For the group of students who attended weekly meals at the professor's house three times or more, the starting place was significantly higher. 80% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement at the beginning of the semester, while 90% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I feel that I currently have a strong knowledge of God's truth" in the end of the semester questionnaire. In other words, those who never attended dinners agreed or strongly agreed with the statement to a lesser percentage than those who frequented meals at the professor's house, but the growth in spiritual knowledge of those who

never came to the professor's house was significant. These numbers may say less about hospitality as a factor in increasing spiritual and Biblical knowledge in students than they say about the success of the college in encouraging the growth in such knowledge during the first semester in all first-year freshmen.



**Figure 11: "I feel that I currently have a strong knowledge of God's truth."**

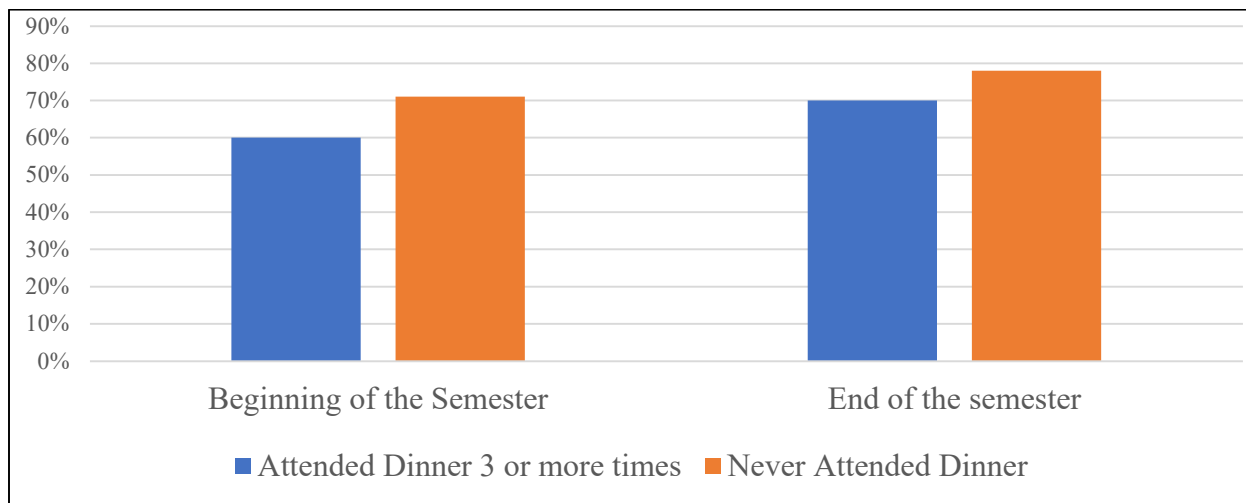


**Figure 12: Percent Growth, Beginning to End of Semester, "I feel that I currently have a strong knowledge of God's truth."**

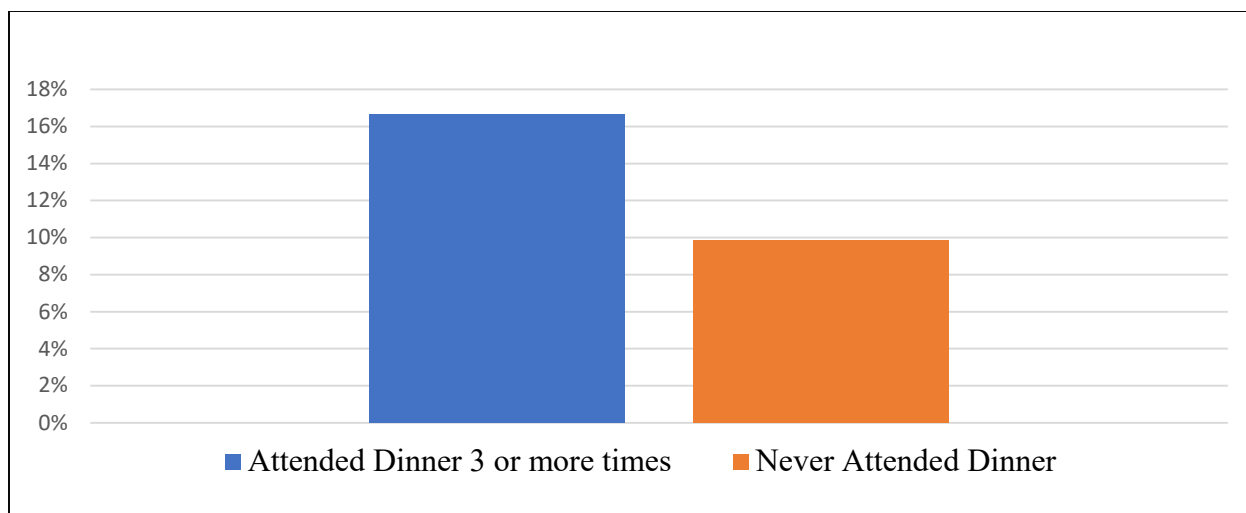
Lastly, in the first category of statements regarding the student's relationship with God is statement 9, which reads "I feel that I currently have a strong knowledge of how God's truth applies to my spiritual life." This statement, while similar to statement 8, is less intellectually



oriented and more centered on practical living out of the Christian life. At the beginning of the semester, a little over 71% of the students who never once attended weekly dinners agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while a little over 78% of the same students agreed or strongly agreed at the end of the semester. To contrast, among the group of students who attended these dinners at least three times, 60% of students agreed or strongly agreed with this statement at the beginning of the semester, while 70% of these same students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I feel that I currently have a strong knowledge of how God’s truth applies to my spiritual life” at the end of the semester. The numbers for both groups for both the beginning of the semester and the end of the semester are similar. There was small but steady growth among both groups, though it is difficult to distinguish the numbers of these groups based on their reception of hospitality alone.



**Figure 13: "I feel that I currently have a strong knowledge of how God’s truth applies to my spiritual life."**



**Figure 14: Percent Growth, Beginning to End of Semester: "I feel that I currently have a strong knowledge of how God's truth applies to my spiritual life."**

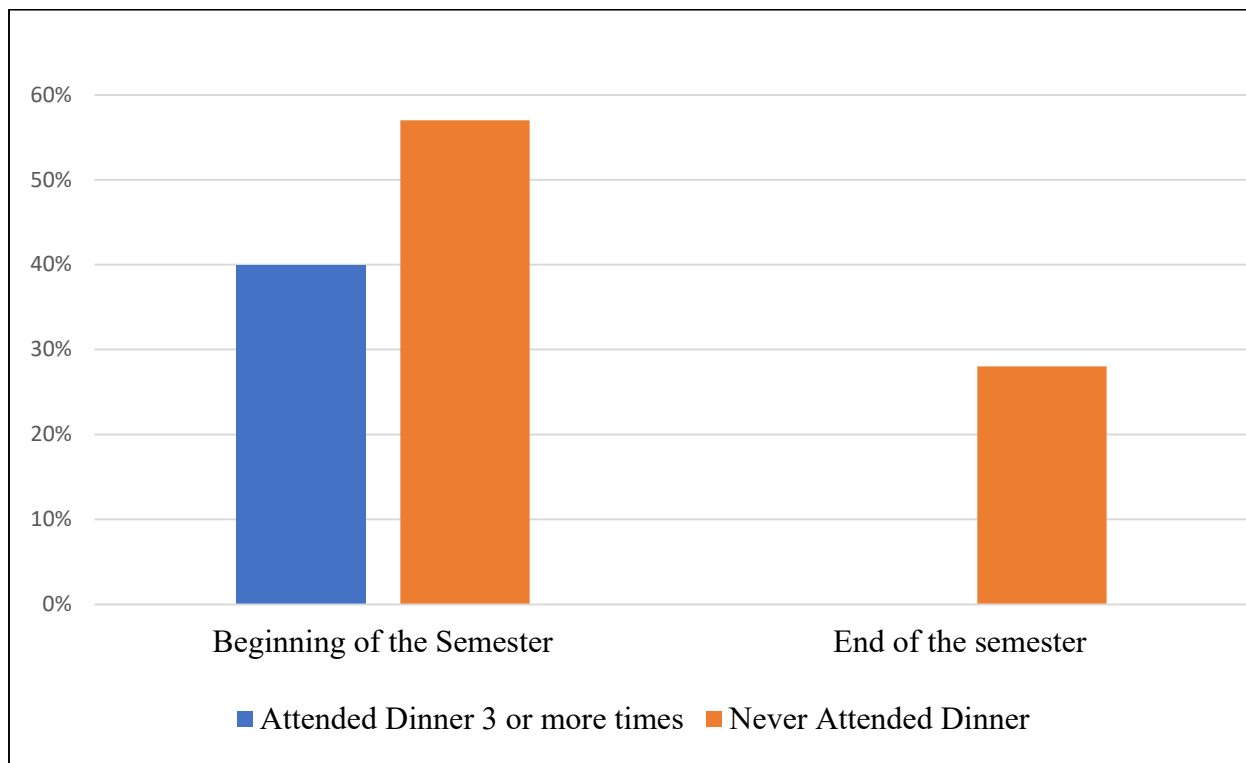
The second category of statements regarding the student's relationship to other students in the Spiritual Formation class included statement 2 ("I know virtually all of the names of the students in my Spiritual Formation class"), and statement 4 ("I feel that I know a fellow student in this Spiritual Formation class with whom I can have serious personal conversations").<sup>54</sup> Growth here was significant for those who came three or more times to weekly dinners in the professor's home.

For statement 2 ("I know virtually all of the names of the students in my Spiritual Formation class"), at the beginning of the semester, about 57% of those who never once came to weekly dinners either disagreed or strongly disagreed. By the end of the semester, this number was cut in half. In regard to statement 2, a smaller proportion of students who would come to weekly dinners three or more times said they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "I know virtually all of the names of the students in my Spiritual Formation class," or about 40%. By the end of the semester, this number was eliminated completely to 0%. In the group of students who came to three or more weekly meals during the course of the semester, 50% said at

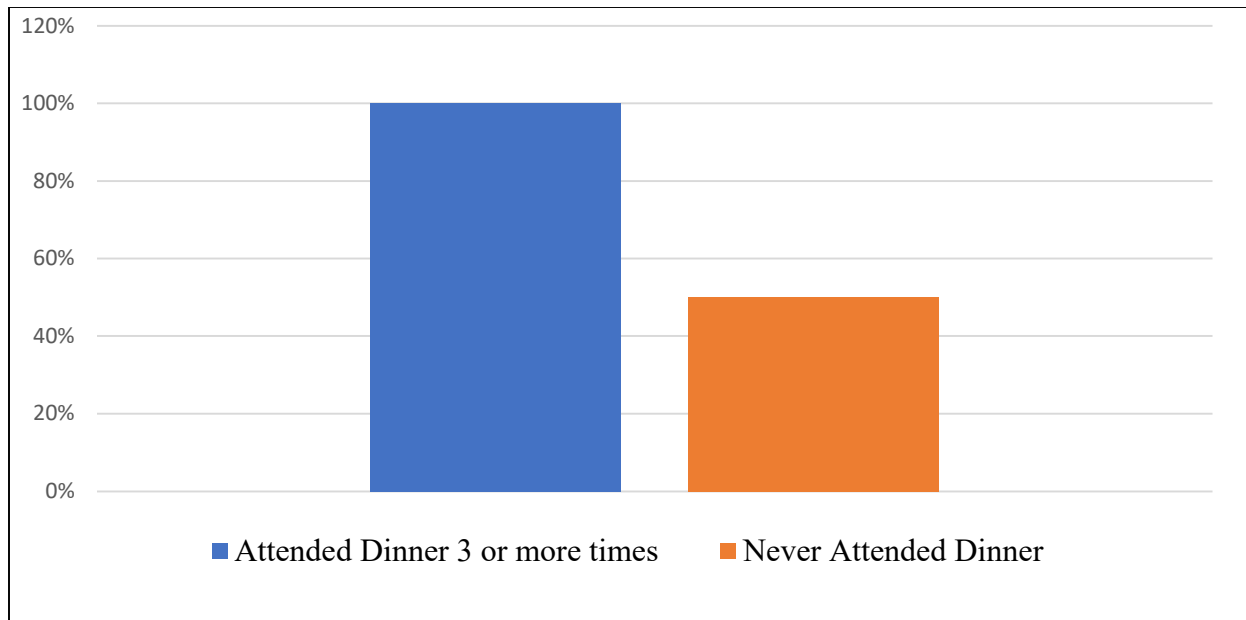
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54. See Appendix A, part III.

the beginning of the semester that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I know virtually all of the names of the students in my Spiritual Formation class.” This number increased to 80% at the end of the semester. It may be fair to interpret by this that some of the students who came frequently to the weekly dinners were already quite comfortable with their peers, since less than 15% of students who never came agreed or strongly agreed with the statement at the beginning of the semester.



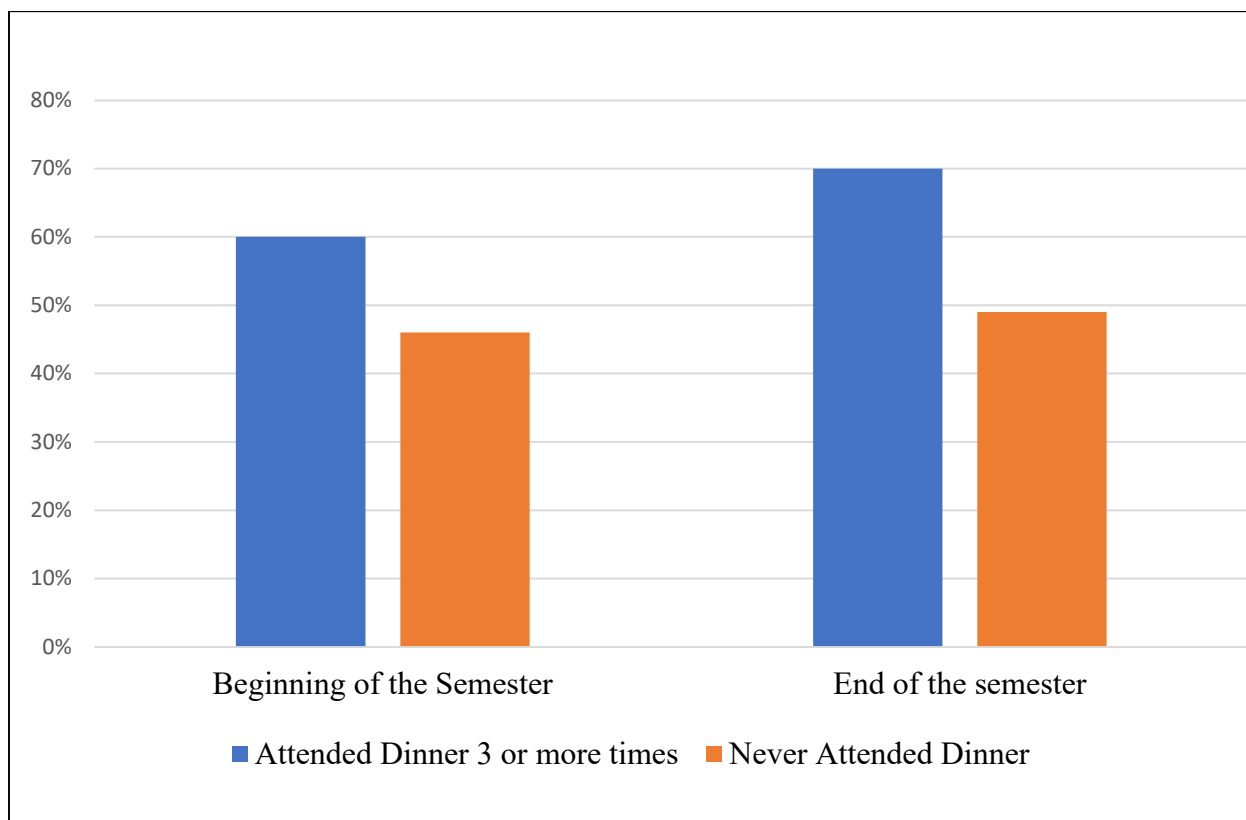
**Figure 15: Students who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement: "I know virtually all of the names of the students in my Spiritual Formation class."**



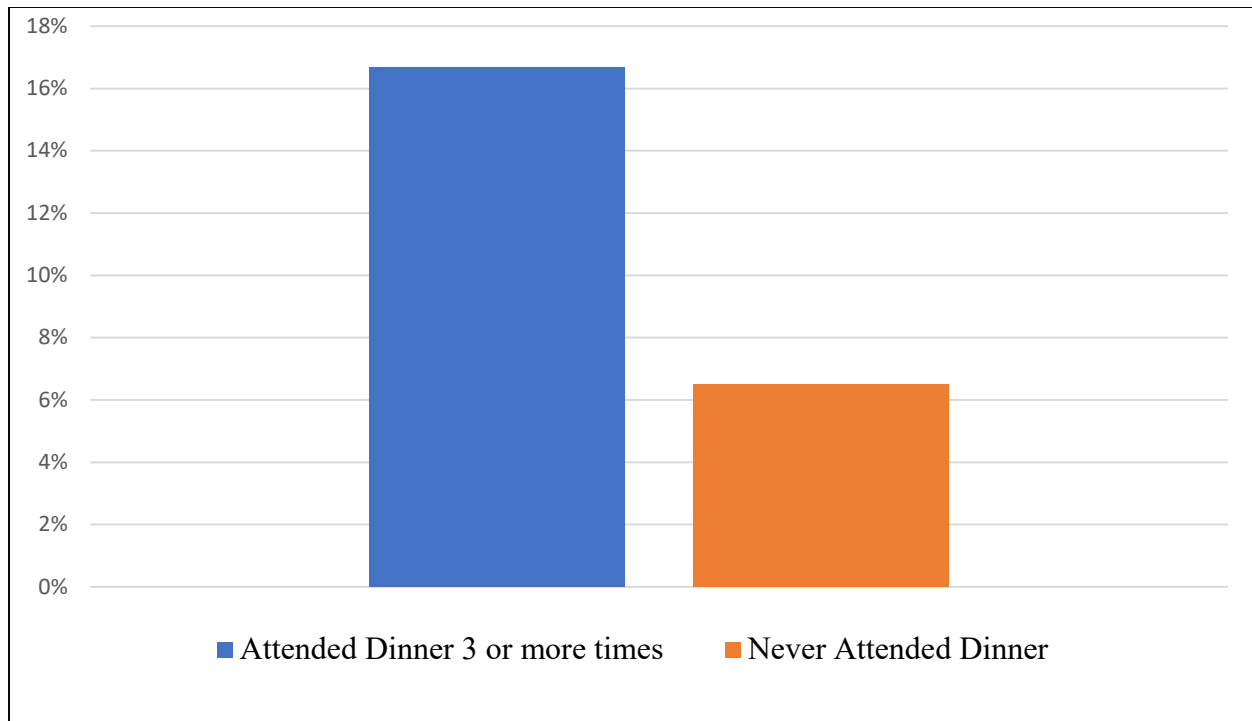
**Figure 16: Percent Reduction, Beginning to End of Semester, Students who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement: "I know virtually all of the names of the students in my Spiritual Formation class."**

Statement 4 demonstrated less differentiation between groups. At the beginning of the semester, 40% of students who never attended weekly dinners either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "I feel that I know a fellow student in this Spiritual Formation class with whom I can have serious personal conversations." At the end of the semester, this number did diminish slightly, to just under 36%. In the same group of students who never attended weekly dinners, just over 46% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I feel that I know a fellow student in this Spiritual Formation class with whom I can have serious personal conversations." At the end of the semester, this number increased slightly to 49%. Among those who attended weekly dinners at the professor's house three or more times, 20% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the "I feel that I know a fellow student in this Spiritual Formation class with whom I can have serious personal conversations" at the beginning of the semester, and this number remained the same at the end of the semester, at 20%. In this same group of those who attended dinners three or more times during the semester, 60% of these

students agreed with the statement “I feel that I know a fellow student in this Spiritual Formation class with whom I can have serious personal conversations” at the beginning of the semester, a number which grew modestly to 70% at the end of the semester. It is worthwhile noting that these dinners were by no means the only manner in which students within these Spiritual Formation classes socialized during the course of the semester. On a small Christian college campus, numerous opportunities exist for student interaction in other classes, residence halls, student events and in the single, on-campus cafeteria.



**Figure 17: "I feel that I know a fellow student in this Spiritual Formation class with whom I can have serious personal conversations."**



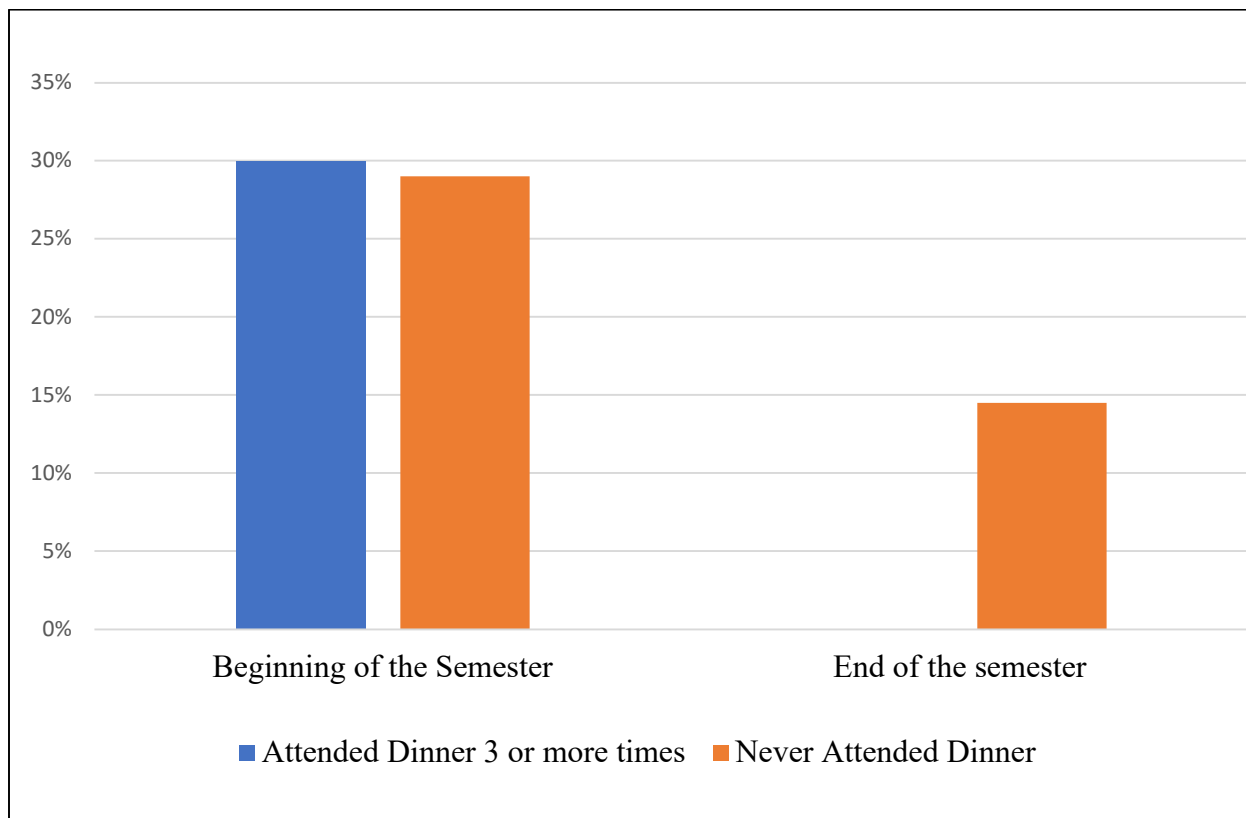
**Figure 18: Percent Growth, Beginning to End of Semester, Students who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "I feel that I know a fellow student in this Spiritual Formation class with whom I can have serious personal conversations."**

The third and final category of statements regarding the student's relationship to the professor of the Spiritual Formation class includes only statement 3 ("I feel I have a mentor with whom I can discuss sensitive matters of spiritual importance to me").<sup>55</sup> The students' perspectives on their relationships specifically with the professor has already been evaluated in this chapter. Nevertheless, the differences between the students who never attended dinners at the professor's home and those who did so frequently are interesting. When evaluating the statement "I feel I have a mentor with whom I can discuss sensitive matters of spiritual importance to me," nearly 29% of students who never attended dinners either disagreed or strongly disagreed at the beginning of the semester. At the end of the semester, this number was cut in half. Among those who came to weekly dinners three times or more, 30% either disagreed

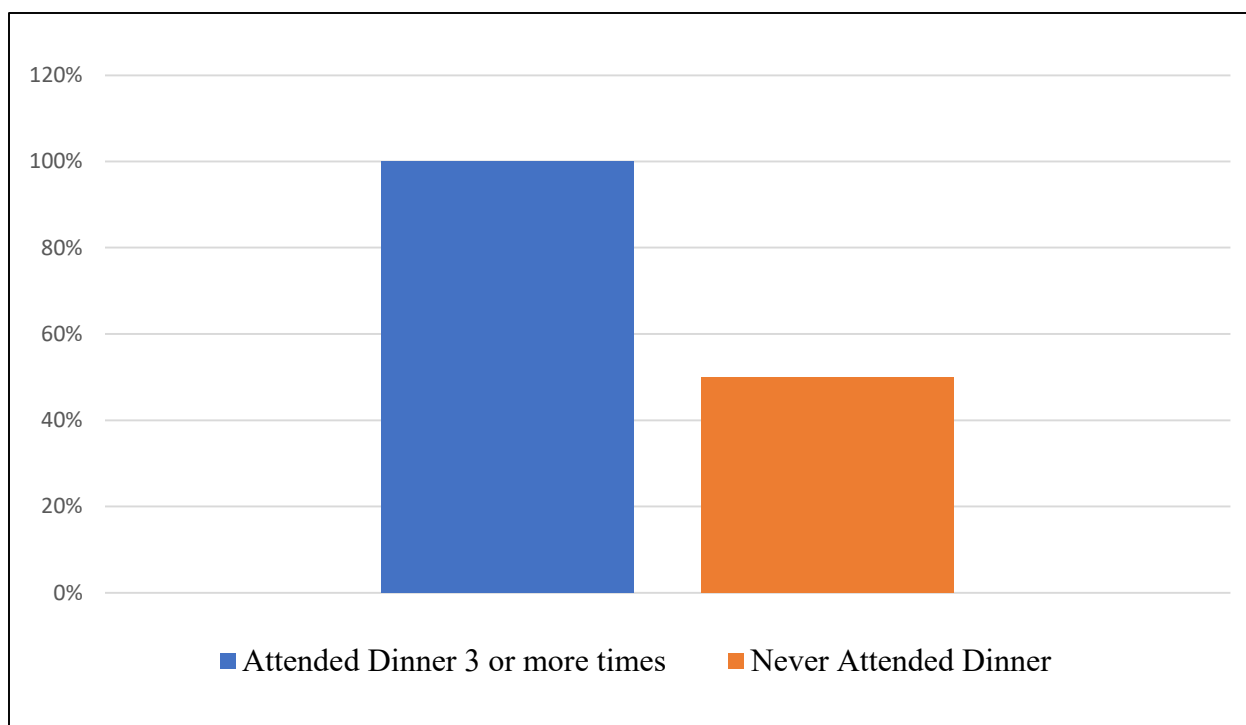
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55. See Appendix A, part III.

or strongly disagreed with the statement “I feel I have a mentor with whom I can discuss sensitive matters of spiritual importance to me” at the beginning of the semester, and this number was reduced to zero at the end of the semester. At the beginning of the semester, among those who attended weekly dinners with great frequency, 50% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I feel I have a mentor with whom I can discuss sensitive matters of spiritual importance to me.” At the end of the semester this number grew to 90%. Statement three does not, of course, specifically have to refer to the students’ Spiritual Formation professor, though several of these students reach out to me frequently via text message or email, asking for me to pray for them or for a sick relative, or asking to meet up for lunch or coffee on campus. All of the students that I have met with in this manner are from the group of students who attended weekly dinners three or more times.



**Figure 19: Students who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement: "I feel I have a mentor with whom I can discuss sensitive matters of spiritual importance to me."**



**Figure 20: Percent Reduction, Beginning to End of Semester, Students who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement: "I feel I have a mentor with whom I can discuss sensitive matters of spiritual importance to me."**

The end of the semester focus group interview also helped to clarify the thoughts of the students who had attended multiple dinners at our home. When asked what the students felt was the most beneficial aspect of the Spiritual Formation class,<sup>56</sup> one student, a freshman female, stated, "I would say it was the content, like number 1, and a second close would be Sunday night dinners. The content was, like I thrive on learning and growing, so gaining knowledge is something that has always appealed to me, so when we have our three-hour classes, it's like really cool, even though sometimes it gets really long. But I still gain a lot and it means a lot to me that we're there. And then Sunday night dinners, it's nice to be around a family and stuff."<sup>57</sup> Another student, a freshman male, answered the same question, saying, "In Spiritual Formation

<sup>56</sup>. See Appendix A, part IV.

<sup>57</sup>. See Appendix C.



I've learned to become more relational with others. As a Christian, I've struggled a little bit with finding a path to grow and have a foundation to be placed in. And, with Spiritual Formation, I was planted, and I learned to be more confident in my growing and have a placement to really succeed. Relationally, having a two-hour long class has really made me more personalized with others...and it has been just me continuing to grow and be more relational with others.”<sup>58</sup> As a side note, this is the same student who was at first very shy and felt most comfortable talking to my then eight-year-old son, Stephen. This student came to virtually all of our weekly dinners throughout the semester.

To summarize these questionnaire results from the beginning and end of the semester, it seems that the offering of Christian hospitality to students reaped a great reward in terms of benefitting the relationships between students and their professor and students and each other, helping to fulfill the second half of the greatest commandment of loving one's neighbor. The numbers are rather significant in terms of growth, and the narrative data is also revealing of the fact that eating together brings people relationally together in dynamic ways. What is less clear is how much hospitality positively affects the student's relationship to God. Students who attended dinners with frequency as well as students who did not both grew, in some ways modestly, in their relationships to God. This is, of course, precisely what a Spiritual Formation class and the many other spiritual growth opportunities offered at a Christian college aim to accomplish. And yet this study found it difficult to distinguish between those who experienced hospitality from the professor and those who did not in terms of excelling in their spiritual lives.

It is not in the nature of Christians, and in the case of this study, low-church Protestants in particular, to see eating together as an inherently spiritual activity, as they are inclined to see

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58. See Appendix C.

prayer, scripture reading, or congregational worship. One's view of holy communion seems to be a particularly important factor here. At the Last Supper, and in 1 Corinthians, communion was observed in the context of a meal, and there was enough bread and wine available in the church at Corinth, that people were stuffing themselves with bread and getting drunk on wine. In the modern Protestant church, particularly among low church congregations and contemporary churches, holy communion is offered in the context not of a meal, but in the context of a service of worship within a church building. The amount of bread offered is a fingerful, and the amount of wine or juice consumed is just a small sip. In other words, portion sizes for holy communion do not constitute what most people refer to as "eating together." Holy communion is an inherently spiritual activity, but it is likely seen by few Christians as constituting the practice of "eating together." Sadly, when one considers the robust Biblical theology of hospitality present in the Old and New Testaments, one may lament that the showing of hospitality, a great spiritual practice of the church, is not even seen as spiritual. Part of the challenge is education.

#### **Part 4: How might this study benefit churches and Christian colleges?**

It is now important to evaluate how this study of Christian students and their experience of hospitality in a Spiritual Formation class is beneficial. This section of chapter five will argue that this study is beneficial to churches as well as to Christian colleges.

For churches, it is inescapable that hospitality is an effective community builder, as reflected in the survey results of this study as well as in the narrative data. Eating together brings Christians relationally together, particularly young people, who may have less experience with it than previous generations. Students' lives are filled with screens, and screen time statistically seems to denigrate rather than encourage one's spiritual and emotional development. Students

need face time over meals with other students, but also with pastors and mentors. Many churches have small groups. These ideally can naturally meet in homes, with real food served to those who come. Such meals need not be opulent nor costly, but practical and easy to make, such as in Rosaria Butterfield's example in *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*. Sunday school classes and Wednesday night dinners, such as what we have at my home church, are excellent community builders. But what if Sunday school classes were small groups that met during the week in homes? Children and teens would be brought together in such a scenario, more than just parents, in relationship with one another.

But it is important that such groups are natural and not forced. I have heard stories where megachurches have instituted small groups to form community, but people are assigned to said groups by a church administrator, which can inhibit relational intimacy among those who attend. I have also heard that some churches will bring these groups to an end after six months or a year, moving people to different groups. While well-intended, this practice seems counterproductive.

During the focus group interview at the end of the semester, students who had attended many of our weekly dinners were asked how Biblical hospitality could be used in a big church where people have had a hard time closely relating to one another.<sup>59</sup> One female student in my New Testament class, who grew up in a third world country as the child of missionaries, answered the question by saying, "I've seen churches that have tried to implement programs for their members in order to try and make them be more hospitable. And it has backfired terribly, to the point where people didn't like hanging out with each other anymore because they felt like the church elders were forcing them to do it. And this is at the church where we had the small group that we were so intimate with and we loved our fellowship with them. And we couldn't

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59. See Appendix A, part IV.

understand why other people in the church were having such a hard time wanting to get together. And I think that's because the church isn't a program, or an organization so much as like a family. And everybody has to want to be there and doing the things together for it to, you know, flow well. And so I feel like the best way to start being hospitable is to just start being hospitable. Like, for individual members to take it upon themselves to invite people over to engage with their community and congregation, instead of waiting for the church to do it for them."<sup>60</sup> Churches might do well to listen to this student's admonition. Hospitable welcome must be a genuine gesture, rather than a church growth program birthed in an administrative meeting. Churches may have to learn to distinguish between encouraging the practice of hospitality and instituting it in a bureaucratic form into their congregation.

It is also significant to consider how churches observe the Eucharist. Regarding the communion meal, can churches encourage not just the monthly or quarterly communion observance within the context of the church service, but make communion elements available to small group leaders for congregants to take with one another in their own homes? For churches with more formal liturgies or disciplines regarding communion, might pastors bless the elements at church, and create a liturgy which could be used by small group lay leaders to host communion meals in their own homes? Furthermore, encouraging youth and young adult pastors to do the same specifically with the student population of their individual ministries might be helpful. I know a former youth pastor and his wife who would host overnights occasionally on Fridays, during which all the females went to the wife's house for dinner and a sleepover, and all the male students had a guys' night at the church. Occasionally, they would also host brunch meals in their home on Saturdays, or on teacher workdays in the public school schedule. Seeing

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60. See Appendix C.

one's mentor behind the scenes creates a spiritual depth in relationship that is not always evident in a large group meeting in the youth room at church.

Another need to which this study leads is education regarding worship. Most Protestants, especially those of low-church or contemporary church worship styles, tend to view spiritual activities as those activities which take place in the church worship service or in an individual devotional time. Hospitality in the Bible is an inherently spiritual act. How might we encourage our church members to view hospitality in such a manner?

This small study of college students is beneficial to colleges as well, especially, of course, Christian colleges. Ideally, one could, in terms of construction, encourage Christian colleges to incorporate staff housing, student housing, and classroom instruction space into comprehensive new facilities containing all three. The use of such facilities could be less rigid, but more fluid. Must a classroom always be solely a classroom? Must a living space be solely a living space? Could a common room house a class? What about the cafeteria? Instead of building massive beautiful buildings with large gathering spaces, perhaps buildings with smaller, more intimate spaces would be more cost effective.

Other approaches could be far more affordable for colleges, however. If a dormitory building has a common room with couches and televisions, could not a class meet there? Could not a residential director have, as a significant part of their responsibilities, the teaching of a first-year Spiritual Life class? Similarly, many campuses have houses either on or adjacent to the property. Rather than convert such spaces into offices, perhaps an effort could be made for professors to live in said houses, so long as they make their dining rooms available to student gatherings, for class or otherwise. For many people, housing is their biggest expense, so it could

be possible to offer housing as part of the compensation package of faculty, as many colleges and especially churches do.

While some strategies for hospitable welcome can be instituted by colleges from the administrative level, students can also be encouraged in smaller ways to demonstrate hospitable welcome themselves. At the end of the semester in our focus group interview at a local café, I asked the students present, all of whom had been to multiple dinners at our house, how Biblical practices of hospitality could be implemented into residential life on a college campus.<sup>61</sup> One student, a freshman female, simply answered that students should not just show up and eat in the college cafeteria, but specifically ask fellow students to eat with them. She added, “you could also invite them back to your dorm. I had this one friend who is a commuter, so I invited her back to my dorm and I have these little mugs that...these cake mixes that you put in your mugs and you make, like, cakes in a mug. And so then I give her one of those and we just talked and laughed and it was really fun.”<sup>62</sup> Of note in this statement is the initiative that this residential student took to show a small form of hospitable welcome to a commuter student, who is not likely to spend much time either in the college cafeteria or making relationships in a dormitory setting.

Another student answered the same question of how Biblical practices of hospitality could be implemented into college residential life by saying, “we might not have that much to offer in ways of inviting people into our dorm room or some of us might have some sort of snack but we can’t offer that much in the way of food, or lodging. But I feel like a very impactful way that college students can offer hospitality is with time. We don’t have that much of it to spare.

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61. See Appendix A, part IV.

62. See Appendix C.

You can tell how much somebody cares about you by how much time they choose to spend with you and invest in you. And...I feel like that's a very selfless way to show someone hospitality in college."<sup>63</sup> The beginning of the semester surveys indicated that there was a discrepancy between the way students preferred to spend time with others, namely face-to-face, and the way that they often spent their free time, namely, in front of a screen. Offering time to people to spend relationally is a meaningful way of addressing this problem.

In addition to this question, a final question I asked students during our focus group interview was this: how could Biblical hospitality be implemented into the classroom on the college campus?<sup>64</sup> One student in my New Testament class, a freshman female, answered with a very simple and yet potentially helpful suggestion: "I think one way you could offer hospitality in the classroom is, if it's a subject you're good at, you can offer your help with studying that subject with another person who may not be doing well in it."<sup>65</sup> Another student, a freshman male in my Tuesday/Thursday Spiritual Formation class stated, "I think a good way to make the classroom more hospitable would be to have it be a discussion-type classroom, like a...somehow my composition professor managed to pull this off in high school, where almost every class we would get into, like, a circle and just talk, and still managed to cover all the course material. And it felt much more personal because we were contributing just as much to each other's learning as the teacher was."<sup>66</sup> This suggestion is simple but effective. Theater seating, where students are all facing forward to see the lecturer facing them does not facilitate discussion or personal

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63. See Appendix C.

64. See Appendix A, part IV.

65. See Appendix C.

66. See Appendix C.

presence in the same way that sitting in a circle does, simply because it prevents students from effectively seeing one another's faces.

Another Spiritual Formation student, a freshman female who had spent a year at a community college in her home state, offered a helpful answer as to how Biblical hospitality could be implemented into the college classroom. She suggested that facial expressions and light conversation could help create an environment of hospitable welcome: "I think that some hospitality in the classroom could be shown even with just a smile, or like, saying hi to someone and communicating that you care. Especially like the first week of school, we all know that it's pretty rough when it's your first semester on campus and you don't know anybody, so you walk into the classroom and sometimes it just feels like they're tense. I found that it was really welcoming and I felt at home, or accepted, when someone reached out and was like, "hey, what's your name? What grade are you? What's your major?...So, yeah, I just think it's really helpful to show it physically, you do care towards the people, and it helps the classroom be more comfortable and able to communicate better."<sup>67</sup>

Another student, a freshman female, suggested that the professor could take prayer requests, even briefly at the beginning of class. She stated, "I think maybe being intentional with coming in the classroom and asking if somebody needs prayer, you know? Like, getting to the nitty gritty, like, hey, what's going on in your life right now? What can we pray about, and maybe even going to scripture with somebody in the classroom. Even if it's just one person a week. And, just talking, maybe one or two people a week. "Hey, how's your week going? What's going on in your life?"<sup>68</sup> Taking personal interest in students, whether it is done by the

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67. See Appendix C.

68. See Appendix C.



professor or by fellow students, creates a hospitable relationship where students feel mutual care and concern among their peers and professors in the classroom.

### **Final Thoughts**

In summary, Christian hospitality allows guests and hosts alike to experience together something that is seldom shared even in our Evangelical Christian culture. A meal served in a home to guests, or even strangers, can offer a profound opportunity for a person to feel a sense of belonging and to witness the benefits of loving Christian community in a way they may have never before experienced. College students immersed in a world that has become excessively digital at the expense of the personal may benefit to an even greater extent. In my visit in 2013 to the L'Abri study center in Southborough, Massachusetts, I was struck by a conversation I had with one of the staff members. A former worker in pastoral church ministry, he began to work for L'Abri upon seeing his very own parishioners, many of whom had struggled repeatedly for years with the same lingering issues, released from their struggles while experiencing Christian hospitality and conversation at a L'Abri study center. The opportunity to escape one's normal context and to be received at a real table in a genuine Christian home had a powerful effect on their lives which they had never seen before in another church or ministry context. May the efforts put forth in this project inspire us as Christians to again open the doors of our homes to strangers and to show them the kind of loving hospitality of which the Bible so frequently speaks.

## APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE INSTRUMENTS

### **I. Beginning of Semester Questionnaire**

This questionnaire is designed to explore the topic of biblical hospitality as it affects college students. The information you provide will be helpful for understanding how Christian hospitality can be utilized in a ministry context or the context of the Christian college/university. This study is being conducted by Toby Grady, an adjunct professor at Toccoa Falls College, and a Doctor of Ministry student at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Please be assured that all of your answers will be kept strictly confidential. The information that you provide will be presented only in summary form, in combination with the responses of other participants in this study. The answers that you give will never be linked with your name. By completing this questionnaire, you have given your consent that you are a voluntary participant in this study.

*This questionnaire is to be given to all students in both BSF 103 sections; these questions are only asked at the beginning of the semester, after two weeks of classes have finished, not at the end of the semester. The nature of the following items relates to the students' personal experience, their close friendships, their families of origin, their church experiences, and their views on technology.*

**Date of Distribution:** September 18, 2018

#### **You.**

1. How would you describe your personality? (a) outgoing/extroverted (b) mostly outgoing but slightly shy, (c) mostly shy but somewhat outgoing, (d) shy/introverted.
2. I feel most recharged when I (a) spend time with people, (b) spend time on digital media, (c) spend time reading, (d) spend time in nature.
3. I spend most of my free-time with (a) people, (b) digital media, (c) reading, (d) in nature.

#### **Close Friendships.**

4. I feel I have some very close friends in my life with which I can share anything. (a) Very true (b) mostly true, (c) mostly untrue, (d) untrue.
5. My *usual* way of interacting with my friends is (a) through texting, (b) through social media, (c) over the phone, (d) face to face.
6. My *preferred* way of interacting with my friends is (a) through texting, (b) through social media, (c) over the phone, (d) face to face.

#### **Family of Origin.**

7. In my family of origin, I was raised by (a) one parent, (b) two parent family (not divorced), (c) two parent family (divorced), (d) grandparents, (e) other.

8. How many times a week during your middle school and high school years did your extended family eat the evening meal at home together? (a) almost every night, (b) four or more times a week, (c) 2-3 nights a week, (d) once a week or less.

9. Since 6th grade, my family attended Sunday worship at a local church approximately this many times a month. (a) Almost never. (b) Once a month. (c) Twice a month. (d) Three times a month (e) Virtually every Sunday.

### **Church.**

10. What size church are you most used to attending (including combined attendance of all services)? (a) under 100 Sunday morning attendance, (b) 100-250 Sunday AM attendance, (c) 250-500 Sunday AM attendance, (d) larger than 500 Sunday AM attendance, (e) I almost never go to church.

11. What is the location of the church you attend? (a) rural, (b) urban, (c) suburban, (d) multi-site (e), I almost never go to church.

12. What is the worship style of the church you attend? (a) traditional low-church (b) traditional high-church, (c) Evangelical contemporary, (d) Evangelical multi-site, (e) I almost never go to church.

13. How many times have you eaten a meal in the home of a person in your church congregation (non-related)? (a) Never, (b) once or twice, (c) three times or more, (d) too many to count, (e) not sure.

14. How many times have you eaten a meal in the home of a ministry leader in your church community (such as a pastor or youth pastor)? (a) Never. (b) once or twice, (c) three times or more, (d) several times, (e) not sure.

15. The use of digital technology (projectors, screens, videos, slides for song lyrics, etc.) in Christian worship is (a) very important (b) somewhat important, (c) neither important nor unimportant, (d) not important at all, (e) digital technology distracts me from worship.

16. Aside from being served a meal, have you experienced other forms of hospitality in your church upbringing? Please give a 1-2 sentence answer:

### **Perspectives on Technology**

17. How many hours a day do you spend on an electronic device in front of a screen (like a smartphone, tablet or laptop, but not including a television) doing things other than homework? (a) 0-1, (b) 1-2, (c) 2-3, (d) 4 or more hours.

18. During meals with friends (at school or at a restaurant), I check my phone (a) more than five times, (b) three or four times, (c) once or twice, (d) never.

19. During a church service, I think it is okay for me to check my phone (a) frequently, to see if someone has messaged me, (b) occasionally, if someone really needs me, (c) only to look at a Bible app, (d) Never...I turn my phone off in church.

20. During family meals (at home or at a restaurant), it is acceptable for me or my family members to check our phones (a) more than five times, (b) three or four times, (c) once or twice, (d) never.

21. Does smartphone technology negatively affect your sleep? If so, how? How often does it affect your sleep?

22. Do you have any friendships that started online and have been sustained entirely in an online form? How do these friendships compare to your friendships which were started and sustained primarily as face-to-face friendships?

## **II. End of Semester Questionnaire**

*This questionnaire is to be given to all students in both BSF 103 sections; these questions are only asked the last week of the semester prior to final exams, not at the beginning of the semester.*

**Date of Distribution:** December 11, 2018

*Please evaluate the following statements on the scale described following each question.*

*Question to be added:*

1. During the course of the semester, I attended a Sunday night dinner event at my professor's house (a) never, (b) 1 time, (c) 2 times, (d) 3-4 times, (e) more than 4 times.

2. Now that the semester is at an end, I feel like I know my Spiritual Formation professor very well. (a) strongly disagree, (b) disagree, (c) neutral, (d) agree, (e) strongly agree.

3. Now that the semester is at an end, I feel like my Spiritual Formation professor knows me very well. (a) strongly disagree, (b) disagree, (c) neutral, (d) agree, (e) strongly agree.

4. What was the most beneficial aspect of the class to your spiritual life? (a) The content discussed during our class period, (b) the spiritual disciplines exercises outside of class, (c) relationships formed within the class, (d) other, please list

\_\_\_\_\_.

## **III. Questionnaire for both the Beginning and End of the Semester**

*This questionnaire is to be asked of all students in both classes at both the beginning of the semester, after two weeks of classes have finished, and at the end of the semester, in the last week before exams.*

1. I feel very close to God right now. (a) strongly disagree, (b) disagree, (c) neutral, (d) agree, (e) strongly agree.
2. I know virtually all of the names of the students in my Spiritual Formation class. (a) strongly disagree, (b) disagree, (c) neutral, (d) agree, (e) strongly agree.
3. I feel that I have a mentor with whom I can discuss sensitive matters of spiritual importance to me. (a) strongly disagree, (b) disagree, (c) neutral, (d) agree, (e) strongly agree.
4. I feel that I know a fellow student in this Spiritual Formation class with whom I can have serious personal conversations. (a) strongly disagree, (b) disagree, (c) neutral, (d) agree, (e) strongly agree.
5. God feels very real to me right now. (a) strongly disagree, (b) disagree, (c) neutral, (d) agree, (e) strongly agree.
6. I feel like God is someone who listens to me. (a) strongly disagree, (b) disagree, (c) neutral, (d) agree, (e) strongly agree.
7. I feel like God is someone who responds to me. (a) strongly disagree, (b) disagree, (c) neutral, (d) agree, (e) strongly agree.
8. I feel that I currently have a strong knowledge of God's truth. (a) strongly disagree, (b) disagree, (c) neutral, (d) agree, (e) strongly agree.
9. I feel that I currently have a strong knowledge of how God's truth applies to my spiritual life. (a) strongly disagree, (b) disagree, (c) neutral, (d) agree, (e) strongly agree.

#### **IV. Focus Group Interview**

*This portion of the protocol will involve 4-6 key students from both BSF 103 classes, who have taken the opportunity to come to dinner at the professor's house with his family on Sunday nights during the semester, with questions asked in a semi-structured format. Students will be selected at random after final exams are given and grades are established, and asked if they would be willing to participate in the focus group interview.*

1. Would you say you feel closely connected to the people in your home church congregation? Why or why not?
2. Can you think of the times in your upbringing when you felt the closest relationally to those in your church congregation? Why do you think you felt such closeness at these times?
3. How do you feel about the use of technology in worship at church?
4. How do you feel about going to a church where the pastor is not present, but preaches from a different location with the sermon projected on the screen?

5. How many people need to attend a church service for you to consider it a good church for you to join? Why?
6. Church (A) has 1000+ people in attendance weekly with a dynamic speaker and a skillful worship band, but when you visit church (A), few people talk to you more than simply saying hello. Church (B) has approximately 100 people in attendance weekly, with a so-so speaker and outdated music, but when you visit, you are invited personally to lunch at the end of the service. Would you rather be a part of Church (A) or Church (B)? Why?
7. What did you feel was the most beneficial aspect of this Spiritual Formation class and why?
8. How do you think your experience of the class might have been different if you never took the chance to come to Sunday night dinner at the professor's home?
9. What was your impression of the professor's invitation to students in your class to come to dinner with his family at their home on Sunday nights?
10. Was it difficult for you to feel comfortable in another person's home? Why or why not?
11. When you talked about the class to other students who were not in the class, what were their responses?
12. How could Biblical hospitality be used in a big church where people have a hard time closely relating to one another?
13. How could these Biblical practices of hospitality be implemented into residential life on a college campus?
13. How could these Biblical practices of hospitality be implemented into the classroom experience on the college campus?

## APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: **“The Lost Practice of Biblical Hospitality”**

Principal Investigator: **Toby Grady, Doctor of Ministry Student, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary**

### **PURPOSE**

This is a research study. The purpose of this research study is to explore the topic of biblical hospitality as it affects college students. The information you provide will be helpful for understanding how Christian hospitality can be utilized in a ministry context or the context of the Christian college/university. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not.

We are inviting you to participate in this research study because you are a first-year student at Toccoa Falls College taking an introductory class in Spiritual Formation.

### **PROCEDURES**

If you agree to participate, your involvement will last for the length of our class together in the fall semester of 2018.

The following procedures are involved in this study. There will be a questionnaire given the third week of our class together, Foundations of Spiritual Formation (BSF 103). A second questionnaire will be given at the end of the semester, the last week of classes before final exams. A few students may be asked at random if they would be interested in volunteering to participate in a focus group lasting one hour with the professor, the week of final exams, and after your final exam is given and grades are completed.

### **RISKS**

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this project.

### **BENEFITS**

There are no personal benefits for participating in this study, but the researcher anticipates that churches and Christian colleges may gain a greater understanding of how technology impacts the current generation of Christian students, and how Biblical definitions of hospitality can be put to use in a relationally lonely age among young people.

### **COMPENSATION**

You will not be compensated for participating in this research project.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. All research information gathered from students will be anonymous, and coded to ensure confidentiality. Furthermore, the information will be securely stored in a private office at a private home. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you cannot be identified.

## **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to take part, or if you stop participating at any time, your decision will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. This questionnaire is not a requirement for the course; your grade is not dependent upon your participation, and since the questionnaire is anonymous, it will be impossible for the professor to track who has and has not filled out the material. You may stop at any time in filling out the information, and may skip questions which you do not desire to answer. You may also request at a later date that your data may be removed from the research. Any research information collected from the participant prior to withdrawing from the study will be included in the study results, unless the student requests otherwise. You may ask any questions about the research, what you will be asked to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear.

## **QUESTIONS**

Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact Professor Toby Grady on the phone at 828-719-7214 or by email at [tgrady@tfc.edu](mailto:tgrady@tfc.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Co-Chair of the Institutional Review Board, David A. Currie, at: [dcurrie@gordonconwell.edu](mailto:dcurrie@gordonconwell.edu); 978-646-4176

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Participant)(Date)

## **RESEARCHER STATEMENT**

I have discussed the above points with the participant. It is my opinion that the participant understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved with participation in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Researcher)(Date)



## APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

Setting: Java Station, a coffee shop in Toccoa, Georgia.

Date and Time: Tuesday night, December 11th, 2018, 7 PM to 8 PM.

Recorded by: Toby Grady, who is the interviewer as listed in the document.

Interviewer: Okay, so would you say you feel closely connected to the people in your home church congregation? And so I might have a couple of people who would say yes, and a couple of people who would say no. So who would...*(side conversation about coffee orders)* So would you say you feel closely connected to the people in your home church congregation? How about some people who do? Who would like to speak on that?

Student: This is Randy.<sup>1</sup> Because they are generally friendly people. And the atmosphere is not like, enclosed like, we don't want you to be here, we're all already comfortable with each other and we don't want anyone else to be included. It's more like we are super open to other people and you can see by the smiles on people's faces or just how they greet you and things like that.

Interviewer: Is most of your interaction at the church? Would you say your interaction with people from your congregation at church on Sunday morning, or is it, like, outside? Or both?

Student: Both.

Interviewer: Anyone want to piggyback on what Randy said?

Student: This is Amanda. I do feel really close with the community at my home church. Um, we live like 20 minutes, 25 minutes from my church, and so a group of us decided to have like a small group of people who lived in our area. And it started on Sunday evenings, we would get together, like this is families, and then, um, we would get together and I was at that time, I was kind of in between the ages of the kids and the adults and I would always sit with the adults. I was 16-17. And this community has slowly become, like, a church within a church and we just do life together. Like, when we have birthdays, the people we invite are people from that small group and a bunch of us ending up going to the same schools, so we were in events together.

Interviewer: So did y'all meet in a house?

Student: We used to. And then the person who hosted us moved to the other, like, a different town. And so we actually haven't gotten together as much anymore. Which has been really hard. And I feel like all of us has felt like, we're missing family. 'Cause we don't get together anymore. It's really sad but whenever there's a really big life event happening, we always get the church group together to celebrate.

Interviewer: Yeah, great. Okay. How about maybe people who don't feel close to the people in their home church? Is there anybody who would say that they don't feel close to their home church congregation? Anyone? Would you say that all of you feel close to your home church congregation? You don't feel close?

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1. All names listed in the focus group interview are pseudonyms.

Student: No. I'm Anna Phillips. And I do not feel close to my home congregation because, um, the problem is transportation. And so basically, I have like three different churches and so then I never really get to set down roots, and so it's really like hard to get close to the people there. So I feel like there are times during, and after the service and all, that we can talk but I never really have the time to because I already do ride with someone else and they already have their established friends. So it is really hard for me to develop my own relationships. So they're kind of like talking the entire time and if I wander off they might leave me or something so it's like I don't really, um, have close ties to a church at all.

Interviewer: So, let's go to the second question. Can you think of the times in your upbringing, this is the second question, when you felt the closest relationally to those in your church congregation? Why do you think you felt so close to people? So, is there a point in time when you felt really close to your home church and why do you think that was, and like, what age do you think you were at?

Student: I'm Jason Smith and the time I felt closest to my church was probably my senior year in high school. Because I started mentoring a lot of the youth in middle school. And I just, like, had good relationships with the adults in my church because I taught children's church for the preschool and Kindergarten class, so I, like, got to know their parents and I went on a missions trip with one of the older people in my church and I was involved with a small group with, like, a lot of the elders in the church. So I got to know, like, everyone in the church, and I just got, like really involved by my senior year.

Interviewer: Okay, that's cool. Good answer. Somebody else have something to add that's like that?

Student: I'm Charles Williams. I'd say the closest time that I ever felt to my church was my junior year and that's because that year my church went on a missions trip, so there was a lot of fundraisers that my church was doing, I spent a lot more time involved with my congregation my junior year, like waking up early for pancake breakfasts, and doing car washes all day long. So it...

Interviewer: Did you do all that stuff in the church?

Student: That was almost all done in the church building with the church congregation. So it was very eye opening and that allowed me to feel much closer because I felt like I was a much stronger part of it.

Interviewer: Anybody feel that, like, being in somebody's home from your church, or eating at your pastor's house, or eating at your youth pastor's house, or something like that could have... was an experience that led you to feel closer and would want to say something about it? (*side conversation about who would answer*)

Student: It's Amanda again. Yeah, I'd say that eating with the members of our church has been one of the strongest bonding experiences that we've done, like we'll spend a lot of time together but there's nothing as genuinely necessary and intimate as, like, eating together. I feel like if somebody asks you to eat with them in this kind of a culture, like, that shows that they have a lot of care for you because that's a lot of time. A lot more time than someone might normally spend with you, like, a full out meal. Not just coffee or saying hi in the church lobby but someone who takes you to a meal or provides a meal for you, it's several hours, maybe a whole afternoon or

evening. And whenever we would get together with church people to do that, we'd be gone for like four or five hours.

Interviewer: That's interesting that you say that because you're kind of contrasting that a little bit with, like, Africa? Because in Africa it's like really normal to be in and out of each other's houses all the time. America is kind of like, oh! Kind of a shock to the system a little bit, in a good way.

Student: This is Lauren. I would say that, yes, all the times where me or my family have gotten together with other families in our church and eaten with them, just like, the time that you spend, it's not even just about the eating, it's about like, yeah, what Amanda was saying, about the intimacy where you're able to, like, swap life stories and just, like, get really real with one another and just really talk and, spend, like, all that time together. I feel like I've grown a lot closer to the people that I've had the time to eat with and spend time like that than I am with any of the other families that we've never reached out to, or that haven't reached out to us. And I know that my family tries to make it a point to invite over new families who come to our church, that way we can not only welcome them in but also get to know them ourselves because, you know, we like to become better friends with the people in our church family, and be united in that way.

Interviewer: Okay, that's awesome. Okay, cool. The next question is a little bit different. How do you guys feel about the use of technology in church? I'm thinking especially like, maybe one of you or two of you go to a multi-site, so you're used to seeing a pastor on a screen, powerpoint, (*conversation about coffee order*) and, um, so how do you feel about technology in church?

Student: My name is Anna Phillips. My boyfriend's family, they go to a multi-site church, for Andy Stanley, and it's called Gwinnett Church, and at first I thought it was very weird, and I still kind of think it's weird just because it, like, feels very impersonal. Because I feel like a pastor should be there to talk to you about, like, your problems and everything. They do have a pastor there, but I feel like it's not the same because he's not leading it. And also I think that technology kind of inhibits things in the church, even though it's Power Point on the screen and all that, at my really old church that is very traditional, we used to have to, like, memorize the songs and I felt like that that was a lot more personal and closer to God. And you just, like, look at the Power Point and it takes a longer time to memorize, like, the lyrics, and like...

Interviewer: How did you...you didn't have anything to look at that had lyrics on it?

Student: We had the hymnbook, I mean, I don't know what it was, but it was a packet of paper with all the songs and you could take it home and just, like, read it over and try to memorize it. Because if you could memorize it, you were, like, the cool kid, I guess.

Interviewer: I've never heard of a church that did that.

Student: It was a really old church. It was called (Name) Community Church. And it was in (State). And then also, but I do feel like there is a positive in technology, because, for people like me who do not always have transportation to get to church, they have the apps so that you can still watch the service at home and all that. And even though you can't really, like, get into the community, it's still something when you don't have any other options.

Interviewer: That's great. That's a great answer. Anybody else have opinions?

Student: This is Olivia. I'd say I appreciate technology in the church up to a certain extent. I mean, I enjoy seeing the Power Point slides of, like, specific notes that the pastor wants to make, because I am a big note taker and I like to write down what they say. And I also like the lyrics being up on the screen so that I am able to sing along. But when it comes to, like, an actual message, I'd much rather see a preacher preaching from the God-breathed book in front of them, than, like, reading something off of their phone. My own youth pastor would encourage like whenever we would go to youth group, he would say I'd rather you'd have an actual Bible than being on your phones because there is something so different about having it in a book in front of you than just scrolling through your phone.

Interviewer: Yeah. I remember the first time, when they had palm pilots, this is before tablets or smartphones, people had palm pilots, and a preaching student in my seminary preaching class, we all had to preach and then we'd be critiqued and he pulled out his, he's like, "and as it says in John chapter 1," he pulled out his palm pilot he went like this, (*gesturing as if he was holding a tablet and looking at the text on the screen*) and we were all like "ugh!" But that's normal now, and it's kind of interesting.

Student: I'm Charles. I'd say, especially in the past couple weeks, having been in a new area and going to a lot of new churches, I've seen and experienced a lot more. Back in my home church, we have the technology but we just have started getting into podcasting, so we're not, we don't livestream, we don't do any of that. But the new church that I go to here does the live streaming and the smoke machines. They've got everything. But I'd say, two of the most memorable experiences of any church that I've been at have been, one, where I was at a camp and the power went out and there was absolutely no technology, and the other, I was in another country and there was no power in the church building. So that kind of speaks to the fact that it's absolutely not needed, but there's nothing inherently wrong with it, I don't believe.

Interviewer: Where was the church overseas?

Student: The church overseas was in Guinea, on the African coast, and we were singing and the language we were singing in is a phonetic language so you can just read what it sounds like it says, and they'll understand what you're saying. So we were able to sing and they were able to understand what we were saying but we didn't know what we were saying. But everyone was just singing together and we all knew what the motive was. So that was what made it powerful.

Interviewer: Okay, cool. Let me change to a different question. Uh, and maybe you have something to say about this, Lauren. Anna, I have your answer on this because you got into this a little bit. How do you feel about going to a church where the pastor is not present, but on a screen? But preaches from a different location with the sermon on the screen? So an example might be a North Point congregation, which the main campus is in Alpharetta, there's a bunch of different places like that. So, Anna has an experience like that.

Student: Are you okay having me answer multiple questions? It's Amanda again. We had a church in (state), it was my dad's home church, and his dad was the pastor there until he passed away. And so we were really close with the pastor there, the main pastor. And it's a big church, and their main service is very loud and has a lot of people in it. But at the same time, they would have a quieter, smaller acoustic service on the other side of the campus in a little building. And, like, it was softer lighting and just a smaller room, and it was acoustic guitar, and it was more soft. And so they would video him preaching in the other building and then broadcast it in this

one so it was in real time. And he was just across the parking lot. And my parents are like introverts who don't like loud noises, so we were always at the acoustic service, but we really, we liked it a lot and because we had like a personal relationship with the pastor, it seemed fine to us. Like we didn't have anything against it. Whereas I feel like if you don't know the pastor that well, or don't have a grounding for like, who he is as a person outside of the church, I feel like that would create a different experience. But for us it was okay.

Interviewer: Okay, that's cool, that's interesting. That's kind of an unusual case. Okay, let's move on to another question. How many people need to attend a church service for you to consider it a good church for you to join? And why? So, you can imagine, like you walk into a church to visit, and there's 25 people. Do you go, "oh, this is cool." Or do you go, "*(uncomfortable laugh)* I guess I'll stay for the service but I'm not coming back." So what do you think that number might be for you?

Student: Hey, this is Kaitlyn. I don't think numbers really matter in a church service, all that matters is like the atmosphere of the service and like if the preacher is, like, preaching right theology.

Interviewer: Okay, cool. That's a great, little short answer. If I could four or five people to give an answer like that, that would be great.

Student: (*Lauren*) Well, I'll say I've grown up in a church that's had less than a hundred members, and I've gone to that church my whole life and so I kind of see it from the other end. And churches that have like thousands of members are like kind of intimidating and scary to me. Because, maybe not scary, but, just, it feels much less personal to me than a small church is, because you know everyone in the church and you know I've grown up with all these people. So, you know I don't think it changes your experience for yourself, but I think that it does change the feel of the community.

Interviewer: Great, awesome. Amber?

Student: This is Amber. When I went on a mission trip, there was a church that like does this thing for the community with the kids. It was a small church. And they did like the worship on, like he was just singing at the podium with nobody up there with him, and I thought it was like, really, like, intimate and special and, like, small.

Interviewer: How many people do you think it was?

Student: Maybe 30, it was pretty small. And coming from a Baptist church with like a decent amount of people it was really different and really nice and, I mean, a service with a big church is also nice. I don't think numbers are quite important but like it was an experience to say the least.

Interviewer: So you go to a big church, and you went to this little church, and you really liked them both?

Student: Yes.

Student: Jason Smith. I'd say the quality of the people at that church is more important than the quantity. Like it depends on why there's 25 or 250 people there. If the reason there's 25 is that they're not warm and inviting and they're just people who scare everyone away, yeah, you're not

gonna want to go there. But if they're 25 people just planting a church and really wanting to see it grow, I think that's what's more important.

Interviewer: Maybe one more person who has a strong opinion about that? (side conversation about who will answer)

Student: (*Anna*) So, recently, I went to the church (name of church), and I was like, this is so awkward, there's like barely like any people here. It's in Toccoa. And at first, I was like, "oh, I think I should just kinda go," just because I am used to like, I don't know, lately I've been used to like a lot bigger churches. But then I actually went to the service, and it was like pretty awesome because the pastor like directly talked to people, and he was (like), "okay, what are your thoughts on this?" And I thought that was like super personal and super cool. And I feel that like the people there had really strong friendships with one another and like they were very welcoming to me. And like, they all came up to me and they would talk to me. And they were very hospitable.

Interviewer: Okay, um, hospitable, maybe welcoming?

Student: Welcoming, yeah, I guess. And like it was pretty obvious that they knew each other very well, and their struggles, you could tell that they were just like trying to help each other out.

Interviewer: Okay, great, okay...

Student: But it was really small, so at first, I was like taken aback.

Interviewer: I've heard good things, I know someone who goes there. I think that's a good church. Okay, this is an interesting question. Get the scene for a second. Okay, Church (A)...I'm gonna give you an option of two churches. Church (A) has 1000 people in attendance weekly, dynamic speaker, really good worship band, but when you visit church (A), few people talk to you more than just simply saying hello. You know, you might have a greeting moment where they say "hello," right? Church (B) has 100 people in attendance weekly, the speaker is so-so, maybe not skillful, not necessarily, I'm not saying heretical but like, not skillful speaker. The music is really outdated. But when you visit, you are personally invited to lunch at the end of the service. Which church service would appeal to you more? Church (A) or Church (B)? Kaitlyn?

Student: This is Kaitlyn. I would probably go to church B because Church B sounds like the church I grew up in...small. Um, and, like I said earlier, it really doesn't matter how good the preacher is as long as he's like preaching the word. And like it really doesn't matter, like, the music, because you could worship to like "On the Old Rugged Cross" than you can worship to "Oceans" by Hillsong.

Student: It's Olivia. I'd definitely go to church B because we are even told in the world how important the church is and we are not meant to walk through life alone and we need relationships. And so if Church A isn't going to be inviting, and there's not going to be real relationships there, then how are we growing in a community, so I'd rather go to Church B.

Student: This is Gail. I would much rather go to Church B, (1) because I grew up in a church like that and (2) I strongly believe that a church isn't just a building, it's a people group, so like, we're called to be the church, and how are you supposed to be the church if you don't have personal relationships with people? The church is just a building so like I would rather go to a

church that has personal, like...I want to feel welcome at a church that I visit and the personal relationships mean a lot to me. So, yeah.

Student: It's Amanda again. Much of my life was spent, like, on the road. And so for me, my answer depends. Um, I don't have the emotional energy to make relationships everywhere I go, so there are lots of times where I would rather have Church A. Especially if I'm in a place for not very long. Because my spiritual growth is more important to me than my emotional growth in community and so if I'm only getting to go to a different church every week, I'd rather have a church that is giving me something that I'm gonna remember and will encourage me throughout the week. However, if it's a church in a place where I'll be for a while, then community is very important, and I've been community-starved many times, enough to know and recognize the value of a strong church with community.

Interviewer: So you would want to join Church B but you would want to visit Church A?

Student: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, great answer. I can understand that from an MK perspective. Very much so.

Student: (*Anna*) For me, I would rather go to church A because, this is gonna sound really bad, but I'm just too used to the impersonal world, so it's like if a stranger asks me to go to lunch with them after church, that is just kind of creepy in our world now. And so it's like, I don't know you, who are you? And, just, okay, thanks, I guess. But at church A, I feel like, I would want personal relationships but, at the same time, I don't know. It's just, Church B, I feel like if they didn't have, like, a really dynamic speaker then I wouldn't connect as well, I guess. Because I'm a person who is moved by, like, words. Or just...

Interviewer: I think that's interesting also, because, some of the answers...some of the answers here have to do with where you're from. Are you from a small town? (*To one student*) You're from everywhere. (*To another student*) You're from a big city. (*To Anna*) You're from everywhere! But now, how long have you lived in Buford, though?

Student: (*Anna*) Two years now.

Interviewer: Okay, let's switch gears to talking about Spiritual Formation in class. So, if you're a New Testament student, this wouldn't apply to you, just to Spiritual Formation students. What did you think was the most beneficial aspect of the class. It doesn't necessarily have to be the content, thought it could be. Doesn't necessarily have to be the room, though it could be. Um, it could be anything. It could be the assignments, or whatever. What do you feel was the most beneficial aspect of the Spiritual Formation class?

Student: This is Amber. I would say it was the content, like number 1, and a second close would be, like, Sunday night dinners. The content was, like I thrive on, like, learning and like, growing, so, like, gaining knowledge is something that has always appealed to me, so when we, like, have our three-hour classes (*laughs*), it's like really cool, even though sometimes it gets, like, really long, but like I still gain a lot and it means a lot to me that we're there. And then Sunday night dinners, it's nice to be around a family and stuff.

Interviewer: Okay, awesome, others in Spiritual Form?

Student: This is Matthew Martin. In Spiritual Formation I've learned to become more relational with others. As a Christian, I've struggled a little bit with finding a path to grow and have a foundation to be placed in. And, with Spiritual Formation, I was planted, and I learned to be more confident in my growing and have a placement to really succeed. Relationally, having a two-hour long class has really made me more personalized with others.

Interviewer: So having that, like, three hour class instead of having it broken up, so it's twice a week?

Student: And it has been just me continuing to grow and be more relational with others.

*(Side note...this student came almost every time to our house for our weekly dinner. At first he was very shy and felt most comfortable talking to my eight year old son).*

Interviewer: I actually was not prepared for the Tuesday night thing, and I've never done it before, and I was like "ugh, Tuesday night, three hours, you've gotta be kidding me," but there is, in some ways it's a better format. Not that, like we had great talks in our Tuesday/Thursday class, but there's something about being able to continue...none of us, I think...all of us, at the end of three hours want to go home, but still.

Student: This is Randy. I think that the most beneficial aspect of the class was that it was multi-faceted. Like, there wasn't just one set way that you were growing spiritually. But there were like different ways and they were in-depth in different ways. Like it wasn't just lectures, it wasn't just, like, assignments, it wasn't just papers, it wasn't just discussion, but it was all those together. And it really forced you to grow in different areas. Both, like, in depth and connecting all those areas into, like, a united spiritual growth.

Student: Jason Smith. It would be the Spiritual Discipline logs. Mostly because it forced me to do things I normally wouldn't do. And ultimately didn't want to do. And it gave me incentive to do them. And it like really helped me grow. And it showed me my weak areas and my strong areas. Before, it's like, "yeah, you know, I just don't have time for devotions," but like, when it's for class, it's like, "well, there's really no other homework assigned, so, it's like, that's the time it would take to do homework anyways, half an hour every night for a class. So, it's like, it was just more like, now there's no excuse, now I have to do it, and it just made me grow closer and showed me a lot of my weak areas. And, uh, it just helped my whole relationship with God grow through it.

Interviewer: Okay, cool, thank you, Jason. For those of you who are in Spiritual Formation, who came over for dinner on Sunday nights, most of you who came over for dinner on Sunday nights came over multiple times, how do you think your experience of the class might have been different if you never took the chance to come on Sunday night dinner to our house?

Student: This is Amber. I don't think I would be able to joke around with everybody as much as we do (laughs). Like, I really feel like we've sort of become almost like this mini family, even how messed up we all are (laughs). It's really been nice getting to know each other, and laughing at the table. And with food...that's a lot of community right there and it's very intentional. And that's really something I can appreciate at the Sunday night dinners.

Interviewer: Again, how do you guys think your experience of the class might have been different if you never took the chance to come to Sunday night dinner?



Student: This is Jason Smith. I think the experience in the class would be a lot different because of relevance with what, like, use the professor word, teaching. A lot of it, like, when teachers tell a story about their family, like random events that happen in their life, a lot of times, you hear it, and it's like, that's interesting. But there's no backstory, it doesn't seem relevant. But then like, when we were actually at your house, and saw it playing out, it was actually like "oh, this actually happens! It's real!" And also, like, I think, knowing the professor in a deeper way helps you understand where he is coming from and what he is teaching.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you very much, Jason. Somebody else want to speak on that?

Student: This is Matthew Martin. Coming to Spiritual Formation class and having dinner with professor has made me more comfortable and more personalized coming to class. If I may have not gone to dinner, I may have dreaded the class and felt uncomfortable with everyone and not really having a deep relationship with others. It definitely has encouraged me to come to class more often and look forward to it.

Interviewer: (to Matthew) Thank you for driving so much. I remember, I guess it was in the early days of the semester, Matthew, I don't know if you'd really connected with people very much yet. And I remember when you first came over, the easiest person for you to talk to was Stephen (the professor's 8 year old son). And I remember you hanging out with Stephen, and then, like, I noticed over the semester that you're a little bit of like the social butterfly of the, at least the Tuesday night class, in some ways. Wouldn't you think? It's kind of true.

Student: Definitely that has made me, like, more comfortable socializing with others, gave me more personalized, like, just more comfortable. Sitting down, having dinner with others gives you that special bonding that you just wouldn't get back in the dorms, or at the college. Just a sense of more comfortable bonding with others, I would say.

Interviewer: Okay, cool, thanks. Alright, next question. Okay, at the beginning of the semester, if you're in my Spiritual Form class, um, actually, this applies to New Testament as well, um, when I said that I was going to invite you over, and you guys can come over for dinner, what was your initial impression of that? Was it like "Dude, this guy is weird, uh, like, it's gonna be strange, is he gonna try to kill us? I don't know!" (Students laugh) What was your initial impression of that? (side conversation about coffee order)

Student: (Gail) So, the first impression when you invited us to your house, I was a little weirded out at first because I had never like been invited to one of my professor's houses before. But it wasn't like a bad weird, I was like, okay, that's different. Like I've never experienced that at the community college. It was just like, go to school, and then come back home and do my own thing. But after we started doing that, and I started coming, I became friends with more people in the class, um, not just Taylor and Tessa. And, like, I was just able to become more personal and like friendly with other people, including you, so that like allowed relationships to grow between the professor and the students which just improved the class in general, I think.

Interviewer: Cool, yeah, Charles. So this is (the question) again, what's your initial impression of the invitation?

Student: I'm Charles. My initial impression just because of my English teacher warning us that we would be invited to a professor's house was "dang, my professor was spot on in high school!" I was a little bit surprised, but like I said, in high school I was kind of, like, prepared for it to be a

much different atmosphere, but then I didn't initially plan on going. I just kind of happened to be walking out of the caf, and saw a group of people, and I stood with them until you showed up, and I was like, "oh that's what this group of people is standing here for!" And then I went, and I enjoyed it, and I went back.

Interviewer: Cool. Olivia?

Student: Olivia again. I kinda piggybacked off of what Charles said, when I first heard it, I was like, "well, that's a little odd, but at the same time, I was like, then again, this is college. It's not high school. So it's kind of expected. Because I've always heard of like professors maybe going out with students or something, but, yeah, um, it wasn't totally unexpected, and it was definitely a great experience.

Interviewer: Anybody else want to speak on that?

Student: (*Amber*) I would say, I told my friend group from back home, my church group, and they were all like, "well, my professors don't care enough about me like that." And so it kind of shows how much you care and, like, that how much you invest in your students, and how, like, your job is not just to teach, I guess, but is to invest in us as Christians as well.

Interviewer: You're sweet. Thank you. Jason wanted to say something and then I'll pass it to Amanda.

Student: (*Jason*) Um, honestly, by the time, like, the invitation came out, I was getting really tired of the cafeteria food, and my initial response was just, "Homemade food?? I'm in! Like, I'm going! I want to see what this is about. I want some homemade food!" And I'm like, "what's the worst that could happen? Like, and then I went, and, I'm like, oh, this is actually fun! It's more than just good food!" So, you know, that was honestly the initial responses. I want the food! (side conversation about the questions)

Student: It's Amanda again. When you first said you were going to invite us over to your house, I didn't believe you. You were like, "I'll totally have you guys over for dinner," and I was like, "yeah, sure, Professor Grady, we'll see if that ever happens!"

Interviewer: You thought I was exaggerating or that I was kidding?

Student: Something that people say but they don't intend to follow up on. (*In exaggerated non-genuine voice*) Like, "I should have you guys over for dinner!" I'm like, "nobody's that crazy, to invite a whole class over for dinner." Um, but then, when you, like, made good on it, I was really relieved, because, like, all throughout high school I had really personal relationships with all my teachers, and, so, getting to go over to your house every week for dinner this semester was a huge part, in like, making me feel welcome and at home at this school.

Interviewer: Okay, thanks Amanda, that's great. Was it difficult for you to feel comfortable in another person's home? Why or why not? So, a mix of people who were like, "at first, it was weird to be in somebody else's home," and then others who are like, "no, it wasn't weird." Anybody? Charles?

Student: (*Charles*) So, some of my closest friends back at high school have the kind of parents that, when you get to their house, they'll tell you to make yourself at home. And if they come back a minute later and you're not sitting down with your shoes off, they'll kind of yell at you

for not making yourself at home. So, I've become, like, used to just, if they say, "make yourself at home," like, okay, shoes come off, I am just, like comfortable. This is almost as much my house as it is theirs, 'cause they give me the right, so I think that helps. Yeah, I felt very welcome, I felt very, I could just talk with whoever, you, your kids, other students, just enjoy the experience.

Interviewer: Okay, cool. Pass it (*the recorder*) along.

Student: (*Amber*) I think it was kind of easy, 'cause the first night of, like, class, with our icebreakers, you already kind of started, like making fun, and poking fun at us and that kind of breaks...I feel like that, like making fun of people, not, like, really hard but like easy jokes, that like, really, that's how you bond with people. Just little jokes here and there, like, so it kind of helped. Like, you already kind of had a feeling about us. And then, so you inviting us was kind of, like, easy going in to it.

Interviewer: I did make fun of you! And proceeded to the rest of the semester! (*laughs*) Olivia got a lot of "abuse" as did Cody! (*students laughing*) But he was asleep when I did it so it didn't matter. Anybody else want to say if it was difficult to feel comfortable in someone else's home, why or why not? Anybody? Anybody, no? Like, at first, it was like, errrr...what do I do here? Anybody feel that way?

Student: (*Lauren*) Maybe the first day. But then I could tell right away that y'all genuinely cared about every person that came into your house. That you wanted them to feel at home and that you wanted to get to know them....(then inaudible for a sentence or two due to noise in the café) I love Katie, your wife is amazing.

Interviewer: She's cool! Isn't she? Okay, a similar question...other people who are not in any of the three classes, and you said, "yeah, we're going over to Professor Grady's for dinner, what was their reaction? Other people's reaction?"

Student: (*Amanda*) They were so jealous. Especially people who knew you. They were like, "man, you're going over to Professor Grady's house? Ugh, I wish I was going over to Professor Grady's house!" We were like, "well, too bad for you!"

Interviewer: Who was it that was jealous?

Student: (*Amanda*) Gerald Ellis.

Interviewer: (*joking*) Good. (*students laughing*) I hope you rubbed it in a little bit.

Student: (*Amanda*) But then you invited him to come. He was so happy.

Interviewer: Good, good, I love Gerald. Who else? (side conversation about recorder)

Student: This is Matthew. A lot of people were, actually, really were jealous. They were, um, kinda envious. Um, I told all my friends about it, and, I actually had one of my friends come along who wasn't in any of the classes. And he even lied to the professor saying, um, how he was in his class. (*people laughing*) And then, he rode along...

Interviewer: (*laughing*) I totally believed it, too.

Student: (*Matthew*) And so he comes along with us time to time. He comes along, so yeah, people were a bit envious. It's nice to have new people come around, um, to really just share the experience we have. So...

Interviewer: Yeah, cool. Anybody else?

Student: Alright, Olivia again. I actually have some interesting input. 'Cause not only did, like other college students seem jealous about it, my high school friends, when I went home and told them about it, they even thought it was cool. And I thought they would think it was weird, because like, they're younger and haven't been to college yet, but they were like, "Oh my God, that's so sweet! That's awesome that you're, like, having that experience and everything, so even high school students seemed, like, excited about it and they don't even know you."

Interviewer: That's fun, cool! Maybe we could convince some people to come to TFC.

Student: Alright, it's Kaitlyn. Um, so my dad was tracking me on the phone one night, heading to Professor Grady's house, and he's like "where are you going?" I'm like, "I'm going to a professor's house." And he said, "buttkisser!"

Interviewer: (*laughing*) That's really funny. (*side conversation about parents tracking students on their phones and saying goodbye to a student who had to leave early*) Okay, there's three more questions. How could Biblical hospitality be used in a big church, like in a big church, where people have a hard time closely relating to one another? How could they use it?

Student: (*Jason*) This is kind of relevant in, like, my church back home. Because it's growing, like, very rapidly. And I think it's the intent of the people who were there previously. Like, to be more than just there going through the motions, for the members of your church to intentionally go out, out of their way, greet and be kind and open to new people. And not just say hi in passing but have deep conversations with them. And I think as Christians, even, like, if you don't wear a title at your church, that should be, like, your intent. Like, if you see someone who's new, you go and you start a conversation, you be kind to them. And I think that's ultimately the best way, the way that I think the Apostles encouraged us to do.

Interviewer: Okay, cool. Good answer. Other folks? How could Biblical hospitality be used in a big church where people have a hard time closely relating to one another?

Student: (*Amanda*) I've seen churches, oh sorry, this is Amanda. I've seen churches that have tried to, like, implement programs for their members in order to try and make them be more hospitable, and it has backfired terribly. Um, to the point where people, like, didn't like hanging out with each other anymore because they felt like the church elders were forcing them to do it. And, um, this is at the church where like we had the small group that we were so intimate with and we loved our fellowship with them, and we couldn't understand why other people in the church were having such a hard time wanting to get together. And, um, I think that's because the church isn't a program, or an organization so much as like a family. And, everybody has to want to be there and doing the things together for it to, you know, flow well, and so I feel like the best way to start being hospitable is to just start being hospitable. Like, for individual members to take it upon themselves to invite people over to engage with their community and congregation, instead of waiting for the church to do it for them.

Interviewer: That's really great. Okay, um, let's go on to the next question. Two more questions. (to barista at café) Thank you. Um, okay, how could these Biblical practices of hospitality be implemented into residential life on a college campus? So, you know, um, yeah, how do you do hospitality on a college campus? It's different.

Student: My name is Anna Phillips and the way that you do hospitality on a college campus is...like, you kinda invite them to go, like, to, like, lunch with you. Like, "hey maybe we could go to lunch today at like, 12, or whatever."

Interviewer: Lunch where?

Student: At the caf. You could also invite them back to your dorm. I had this one friend who is a commuter, so I invited her back to my dorm and I have, like, these little mugs, like, that...these cake mixes that you put in your mugs and you make, like, cakes in a mug. And so then I give her one of those and we just talked and laughed and it was really fun.

Interviewer: We're buying...My wife is buying my niece a mug cake cookbook for Christmas. She goes to Clemson. So, yeah that's cool that you say that. Amanda?

Student: (Amanda) Um, because we might not have that much to offer in ways of inviting people into our dorm room or, like, some of us might have, like, some sort of snack but we can't offer that much in the way of food, or lodging, but I feel like a very impactful way that college students can offer hospitality is with time. We don't have that much of it to spare. You can tell how much somebody cares about you by how much time they choose to spend with you and invest in you. And that's a, I feel like that's a very selfless way to show someone hospitality in college.

Interviewer: Yeah. I mean, hospitality does take time. That's awesome. Um, anybody else? How could we do hospitality on a college campus? It's a hard question, isn't it?

Student: Hey, this is Jason Smith. Um, showing hospitality on a college campus definitely means you have to go out of your way and be intentional about it. Like, me as not being particularly outgoing in that aspect, like, I find it hard to do and I don't like to do it, but it's kind of like you see someone, and you're like, I need to go talk to 'em. And a lot of times I think we bail. There's like, when they're like that, usually, like, they're hurting or they're trying to be secluded. And they don't make it easy. And I think subconsciously a lot of times we're like, "well, they don't want my help, so I'm just gonna leave." I don't think that's how we should approach it. I think we should be trying, strive to be more intentional in our reactions with people. And, uh, strive to really understand what they're going through and express empathy towards them.

Interviewer: Okay, awesome, thank you. Um, okay, similar question...how could you implement Biblical hospitality into the classroom on the college campus? So, move it from dorm or cafeteria or personal interactions...how do you make it, um, how do you do it in the classroom?

Student: It's Kaitlyn. I think one way you could offer hospitality in the classroom is, if it's a subject, like, you're good at, you can offer your help with, uh, studying that subject with another person who may not be doing well in it.

Interviewer: Say that again? Offer..."

Student: Help.

Interviewer: Oh, study help.

Student: Study help, yeah. Not cheating help.

Interviewer: (*laughs*) Good answer. Okay, cool. Charles?

Student: (*Charles*) Um, I think a good way to make the classroom more hospitable would be to have it be a discussion-type classroom, like a...somehow my composition professor managed to pull this off in high school, where almost every class we would get into, like, a circle and just talk, and still managed to cover all the course material. And it felt much more personal because we were contributing just as much to each other's learning as the teacher was. But, depending on the subject matter, that could be almost impossible to do.

Interviewer: Okay, good answer. Who brought food to my Spiritual Formation class on Tuesday nights all the time? Who did that?

Student: (*unknown*) Jennifer.

Interviewer: Was that Jennifer? I think even that was helpful. I mean, just having a couple of candy bars to throw at Cody when he fell asleep, you know? Uh, anything else that anyone wants to add? How can you bring biblical hospitality into the classroom?

Student: (*Gail*) Um, I think that some hospitality in the classroom could be shown even with just a smile, or like, saying hi to someone and communicating that you care. Especially like the first week of school, we all know that, like, it's pretty rough when it's your first semester on campus and you don't know anybody, so, like, you walk into the classroom and sometimes it just feels like, they're tense. I found that, like, it was really welcoming and I felt, like, at home, or, like, accepted, when someone reached out and was like, "hey, what's your name? Like, what grade are you? Like, what's your major? Blah, blah, blah. So, yeah, I just think it's really helpful to, like, show it physically, you do care towards the people, and it helps the classroom be more comfortable and able to communicate better, I guess.

Interviewer: Good. Good, good. Okay, um, Amber?

Student: (*Amber*) Uh, Amber again. I think maybe being intentional with, like, coming in the classroom and asking if somebody needs, like, prayer, you know? Like, getting to the nitty gritty, like, hey, what's going on in your life right now? Like, what can we pray about, um, and maybe even, like, going to scripture with somebody in the classroom. Even if it's just one person a week.

Interviewer: Going what?

Student: In the scriptures with somebody. And, like just talking...maybe one or two people a week, "hey, how's your week going? What's going on in your life? You know?"

Interviewer: Go ahead, Gail.

Student: (*Gail*) One really cool thing in one of my other classes, my English class. My professor, um, Thomas asked for, like, prayer requests at the beginning of class. And some other teachers do devotions, so I think that's really helpful because it makes it more of, like, an intimate environment, like, where you can feel comfortable in your faith, and, well, that's pretty obvious because we're on a Christian campus, but, like, at the Community College it was, like,

completely different, like classrooms have just a completely different dynamic at TFC than they do at other universities, so I think it's really important to practice that out in all classrooms, so that we can make faith part of the education we're receiving, so...

Interviewer: The Biology 101 and 102 that I took at University of Georgia, um, were in 350 seat lecture halls. Um, they were so big that they didn't know who came and who didn't, they didn't even take attendance. So, I um, actually had a friend...*(recording ends in the middle of Interviewer telling story of two students who played a prank in a large lecture hall class because the students, due to the size of the class, were anonymous to the professor and to each other)*

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